Resilient relocation: The experience of single Anglo women over 50 as recent immigrants to Israel

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Aliyah, meaning to rise or ascend, refers to the phenomenon of ongoing predominately Jewish immigration to Israel for religious, sociocultural and idealistic reasons, or to escape cultural and religious persecution. Since research into the current demographic is limited, from both a cross-cultural and positive psychological perspective, the qualitative methodology and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, were employed to explore the lived experience of three women; recent lone immigrants to Israel from the UK or US, aged between 50 and 65. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, with analysis revealing five superordinate themes, common to all participants: life journey, acculturation, transcendence, intrinsic identity, and meaning and purpose. Subthemes were also common to all participants. Findings indicated that cultural adaptation was facilitated by the participants' perception of *Aliyah* as a positive psychological intervention; participants experienced greater well-being, despite concurrent difficulties with acculturation, reporting personal growth and resilient coping. Scope for further research is suggested, aiding the development of resources to support acculturation for this and other immigrant communities.

Keywords: acculturation; cultural persecution; Israel; Jewish immigration; religious persecution

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This research explored the experience of single Anglo women, aged between 50 and 65, who within the two years prior to participating in this study, and permanently relocated to Israel, from either the UK or US. Context is offered for the uniqueness of *Aliyah* as an immigration phenomenon, as well as the application of positive psychological theory as supportive of the relocation process. According to the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2017), 258 million people live in countries other than their birth nation. While immigration as refugee or asylum seeker may be viewed differently from actively choosing to leave one's birth nation for the purposes of enhancing life experience or socioeconomic status, research suggests that in all instances, immigration requires a re-evaluation of identity, reassessment of future plans and acclimatisation to a new culture, with possible far reaching psychological effects long after the physical upheaval of relocation has ended (Berry, 2006; Strang & Ager, 2010).

The phenomenon of Aliyah

The use of the term *Aliyah*, from the Hebrew word translating as to rise or elevate, to describe Jewish immigration to Israel, stems from the conviction that moving to Israel as the ancient Jewish homeland, elevates one's soul. Though not solely Jewish, permanent immigrants to Israel, whether secular or religious, are often motivated by idealism, a desire for cultural acceptance or a belief that fitting into a predominantly Jewish society offers a sense of belonging which may have been lacking in the host nation (Ben-Porat, 2013; Johnson, 2013). Israel offers religious freedom in the Middle East for all faiths, with a pro-immigration policy facilitating citizenship for Jews and their families from anywhere in the world (Smooha, 2002; The Jewish Agency, 2014). Furthermore, many Jews continue to view Israel as offering protection from widely reported recent global increases in anti-Semitism (Cotler, 2010; United States Department of State, 2008).

Since the pre- and post-World-War-Two influxes of persecuted, displaced Middle Eastern and European Jews and Holocaust survivors, the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS; 2019) reported recent arrivals of large numbers of immigrants from Russia, Ukraine, Ethiopia and France, with an ongoing influx of smaller numbers from the UK, US, and other global destinations. As a nation of immigrants, Israel is multifaceted, complex and comprises a diverse mix of political, religious, socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds. Though identifying as the Jewish state, a fifth of the population are Israeli Arabs and five percent other faiths (CBS, 2019). Social divisions exist, not only between Arabs and Jews, but between genders and Jewish secular, traditional, religious and ethnic groups (Avineri, 2017). Furthermore, whilst Israel is considered a hub of technological, medical and business innovation and by the current definition, a first world nation, ordinary Israelis often fail to benefit from these advances, due to gaps in a bureaucratic system encompassing a challenging mix of Middle Eastern and Eastern European mentalities (Ben-Porat, 2013; Zerubavel, 2000).

Nonetheless, Israel recently ranked as the 13th happiest country globally, reflecting the spirit of a nation whose people, despite multiple differences, demonstrate a remarkable sense of community, warmth, and unity in times of trouble (Avineri, 2017; Ward, 2008; World Happiness Report, 2019). Though for many new immigrants, life in Israel is vastly different from their host nations, research argues that adaptation may be facilitated by open-mindedness about cultural and social differences, acceptance of changes in employment opportunities or standard of living and increased quality of life, through becoming part of a society where one's religious and spiritual identity is unquestioned (Amit & Bar-Lev, 2015).

Positive psychological considerations supporting cultural adaptation

The burgeoning field of positive psychology has shifted the focus of psychological research from the alleviation of negative human behaviour and suffering, to the exploration of factors facilitating resilience, flourishing and optimal well-being (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Without negating the potential adverse effects, positive psychological research argues that difficult life events may provide opportunities for enhanced resilience and personal growth (Relojo-Howell, 2017; Southwick & Charney, 2018). Studies have evidenced that behaviours offering protection from the effects of adversity can be learned, in both organisational and personal contexts (Parks & Schueller, 2014). Proyer et al., (2014) found that applications of Positive Psychological Interventions (PPIs); gratitude practices and utilising character strengths, created long lasting effects on well-being levels, effective for people of all age groups. Furthermore, active utilisation of positive coping strategies may impact well-being and resilience levels more than individual differences in personality, physical ability or socioeconomic status (Ivtzan et al., 2015).

The three stages of relocation – planning, transit, and departure – often induce prolonged stress, however, much like during other difficult and ongoing circumstances, such as serious illness, bereavement or divorce, an individual's pre-immigration problem-solving abilities may help mediate the adverse effects of relocation (Amit, 2010; Weiss & Berger, 2012). A sense of meaning and purpose, self-compassion, gratitude practice, personal character strengths, developing language proficiency and contact with other immigrants who have successfully managed their bicultural identity may all positively impact the experience of relocation, so that it becomes one of personal transformation and growth (Amit & Bar-Lev, 2015).

Research rationale

Israel offers structured life paths for immigrant families and lone immigrant youth, including military service and highly subsidised educational programmes for the under thirty-fives. However, no such programmes exist for older adults (The Jewish Agency, 2014). Despite active contribution in every area of society, as combat soldiers, scientists and politicians, the dichotomous nature of Israel as a modern state with roots in religiosity and leanings towards a family-oriented rather than individualistic society, mean that women are generally still expected to marry and become mothers, often earn less than men, are less represented in government and expected to retire earlier than men. (Remennick, 2000; Rosenthal, 2008). Older women are less likely than men to find meaningful employment opportunities, which often requires a process of re-evaluation of career direction and social status (Lavee & Katz, 2003). Furthermore, adaptation may be particularly challenging for women transitioning from their traditional gender roles of mothers, wives, homemakers, or caregivers (Amit & Bar Lev, 2015; Remmenick, 2013).

Though there are many Anglo or English-speaking Jewish immigrant communities in Israel, however, the primary researcher's familiarity with UK and US communities facilitated an interest in the lived experience of *Aliyah* for women from these communities, since Western women choosing *Aliyah* are underrepresented in current *Aliyah* literature, which has recently largely focused on Russian and Ethiopian immigrants (Berger, 2013). Furthermore, relocation agencies such as *Nefesh b'Nefesh* often group these communities together for the purposes of providing support, information and resources in English; therefore it was assumed that the participants will all have had access to similar resources (Kantor, 2017).

Participants' views regarding personal traits, attributes and strengths which may have supported integration into Israeli society, allowed for exploration of the phenomenon of *Aliyah* from a positive psychological and sociocultural viewpoint. Though previous theories and models of acclimatisation,

acculturation, and social and cross-cultural psychological perspectives of immigration offer valuable definitions and explanations of the concept of immigration, they frequently lack the ability to consider the experience of the individual, therefore losing the voice of the immigrant (Berry, 2006; Larkin et al., 2006). For this reason, the qualitative research methodology of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA; Smith, 2015) was selected for the current study, allowing for consideration of the lived experience of the phenomenon of Aliyah, directly from the viewpoint of the participant.

METHODOLOGY

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis is idiographic and non-assumptive, focusing on the distinct experience of each participant as an expert on the phenomenon being explored, while also deducing meaning of lived experience from the whole sample. An effort is made to ensure a homogenous sample to whatever degree is possible (Smith, 2015). From an epistemological perspective, IPA assumes the stance of realism or the existence of the self (Smith et al., 2009). Based in phenomenology, IPA is considered a subcategory of philosophy, exploring what it is like to be, or to experience a phenomenon (Husserl, 2012). Ontologically, IPA considers experience from a hermeneutic perspective, being concerned with the experience of being or existing in the world, considering things are they appear, whilst also interpreting meaning (Heidegger, 1996). The theoretically informed methodology of IPA is such that both researcher and participant co-create the interpretation of the data; we feel, sense and are present for our lived experiences, through our physical being in time and space, rather than outside of ourselves, therefore while it is impossible to be completely removed from the IPA process, reflexivity on the part of the researcher allows the participant's experience to shape the finding of the study (Larkin et al., 2011). The current study contributed to qualitative literature on Aliyah and cultural adaptation, giving voice to the participants, revealing the meaning of their lived experience of relocation and factors supporting their sustained well-being (Smith et al.,2009).

A purposive, homogenous, self-selected sample was recruited, of three women fitting the research criteria as follows: (1) having emigrated to Israel, within the last two years; (2) having originated from either the UK or the US; (3) being aged between 50 and 65; and (4) having emigrated alone. Snowball sampling was implemented via posts in Anglo-Israeli social media groups for immigrants on Facebook and through email contact with Jewish immigration agencies (The Jewish Agency or *Nefesh b'Nefesh*). Three participants were chosen in order of response time via Facebook and were initially contacted via email.

Table 1
Description of Participants

Relocation number	Age	Marital status	Country of origin	Relocation date
1	64	Divorced	UK	April 2016
2	58	Divorced	US	August 2015
3	63	Divorced	US	July 2016

Participant 1 is a mother of two adult females who live outside of Israel. She previously attempted *Aliyah* as a younger woman and becoming homesick, she returned to the UK where she spent her adult life until her recent relocation. Her mother was a refugee and father a member of the Kindertransport. She describes her upbringing with awareness of familial emotional suppression, barely mentioning her mother, while admiring her father's life of contribution and acknowledging his reluctance to discuss his life outside of the UK. Her narrative suggests her own emotional difficulties with her upbringing, though she expresses a strong sense of idealism and connection to her Jewish roots.

Participant 2 is the mother of an adult male and female, both outside of Israel. Born a Christian, she actively chose conversion to Judaism, describing her family as explorers and pioneers, with an ancestral background of both relocation and changing faiths. Having left a difficult marriage, she struggles culturally and socially and with her financial ability to continue to sustain her life in Israel. She has a new partner in Israel and while she is hopeful of the relationship continuing, she enjoys, but is not reliant on this relationship. Her choice of a more religious community suggests her need for self-enforced boundaries as she develops her social identity.

Participant 3 is the mother of one adult male, who relocated to Israel five years before her. She describes suppressing her Jewish identity while serving in the US Navy, for fear of discrimination. Her father was a university professor, her mother an immigrant to the US from a wealthy family. While she discusses a childhood of freedom and exploration, she simultaneously struggles with her mother's drug and alcohol addictions and eventually abandons her role as her father's helper for a military career. She describes her current conflict; transitioning to civilian life, learning to fill her days for herself and having to recreate a social circle outside of the military.

A semi-structured interview schedule was designed, with questions carefully worded to allow for free disclosure. Participants live in Israel; therefore, data was obtained through the primary researcher conducting three semi-structured Skype video interviews, an hour or less in length, digitally recorded using mp3 Skype recorder software. The purpose of the interview was described to the participants as a way of finding out about their experience or relocating to Israel as single Anglo women. Through summarising and reflecting answers, further disclosure was encouraged where the researcher sensed that participant's responses warranted deeper exploration

Data was analysed following the process of IPA as described by Smith et al., (2009). Interviews were listened to several times, familiarising the researcher with the data, then transcribed verbatim. Analysis was carried out initially on a case by case basis; interview transcripts were reread several times, before the researcher annotated the transcripts in Microsoft Excel, using the right-hand margin for exploratory comments. Descriptive comments summarised what the researcher thought was meant by the participant (in standard text), linguistic comments were used where the language used by the participant was perceived by the researcher as being of relevance or importance (in italics) and conceptual comments were made (in underlined text), where the researcher interpreted possible underlying meaning for the participant. Once exploratory coding was completed, the left-hand margin was used to note potential initial emergent themes and interpretative remarks on the data.

Comments were re-read and emergent themes were developed, with supporting excerpts for each theme collated from the original transcripts. The researcher then further analysed the themes, considering how they might be connected, employing a hermeneutic, circular process of interpretation, revisiting and reconsidering themes throughout this process. Factors such as relationships between conflicting or opposing concepts, number of occurrences and narrative context to the data were all examined. Superordinate and subordinate themes were developed for each case and with analysis then conducted across all cases, a final master table of superordinate and subordinate themes was produced (Table 2). Themes which were not considered intrinsic to this study were not reported.

The primary researcher conducted analyses without the intention of developing theoretical conclusions, considering and interpreting each participant's unique experience. The secondary researcher supervised the analysis process, ensuring that themes seemed relevant to the data. No further comment was made by the supervisor on interpretation of the data, since the double hermeneutic process of IPA is such that the primary researcher's interpretation was pivotal, therefore external comment may have changed the meaning of the interpretation. From a phenomenological perspective, the participants' words formed the essence of this study. An audit trail of decisions and steps taken during the analytical process, enabling

themes to be traced back to the verbatim transcription of each participant's words, ensured trustworthiness of the analysis (Smith, 2015). Awareness of personal and cultural similarities to the participants facilitated the primary researcher's reflexivity during analysis and a reflexive account, comprising notes and observations compiled throughout the duration of the study, allowed for expansion on these considerations. Though relevant literature was considered before the analysis, the idiographic nature of findings warranted the inclusion of further research, based on the exploration of each participant's experiences.

This study was undertaken by the primary researcher as part fulfilment of the Masters in Applied Positive Psychology. Ethical approval was granted by Buckinghamshire New University's Ethics Committee. Participants were provided with an information sheet before their interviews, a debrief sheet after the interview and requested to provide written informed consent via digital signature. Participants were advised of the voluntary nature of their participation and of their right to withdraw. The primary researcher stored recordings in password protected cloud-based files, for possible future research. Anonymity was ensured when transcribing data through omission of names and places. Participants were referred to the relevant support agencies with details made available on the debrief statement provided after the interviews and participants become upset or anxious during questioning due to the sensitive nature of the subject matter, the researcher would have offered to pause or stop the interview. However, all participants were comfortable with the interview process.

RESULTS

Analysis of the participants' verbatim transcripts led to the emergence of five superordinate themes and subordinate themes as noted in Table 2.

Table 1
Superordinate and Subordinate Themes

Superordinate	Subordinate
Life journey	• Maternal bond
	• Life stages
	• Future self
Acculturation	• Social acceptance and relationships
	• Community and belonging
	• Social and cultural diversity
	• Cultural duality
	• Language barrier
Transcendence	• Managing bureaucracy
	• Self-reliance and independence
	• Positive coping
	• Freedom and fun
Intrinsic identity	• Familial influence
	• Self-perception and self-worth
	• Religion and spirituality
Purpose and meaning	• Dream fulfilment
	• Contribution, helping, organising
	• Refuge and security

Subordinate theme 1: Life journey

Participants express the meaning of relocation to Israel with a sense of continuity, of next steps, rather than as a new start and with a sense of growth and change.

Maternal bond. As mothers of adult children, all participants describe re-evaluation of their maternal relationships:

> 'Now my children are all grown up and er... self-sufficient and I've always, always wanted to be back in Israel. So, my children said to me... well now are your time Mum...' (P1)

> 'And so they were very excited, and once I got their approval, then I started the process to make *Aliyah*...' (P2)

> 'And of course, I'm closer with my son too. Physically close, it's easier to... so I can see him er...' (P3)

Life stages. Participants express awareness of transitioning through stages of life, each describing a pivotal time or event as preceding the decision to relocate:

> 'So, when I got the divorce settlement, I had four years of spousal support, so I knew every month I was getting a certain amount of money that was going to be plenty for me to live.' (P2)

> 'I ... I felt that if I didn't make the change now, I might, I probably would, always regret not coming and not... and not trying and seeing how it worked.' (P1)

> 'The last 17 years, when I was working with the City of [place of work in the US] it began to gnaw on me quite a bit, it really did.'(P3)

Future self. Participants discuss visions and hopes for their future selves, expressing a lack of certainty, for both social and practical reasons:

> 'I have always had a plan B and the plan B would only come into effect after a minimum of three years here, when I gave it a good, you know, a good testing.' (P1)

> 'Erm, because there's a lot of times, like now, when I can't see how I'm gonna make it. 'Cause my support, that spousal support aforementioned ends in December, and so [laughs] and I'm not really sure that I'm gonna have what I need.' (P2)

> 'Erm... I'm really wanting to stay here. I really, really, really, really want to but at the same time too I think you're figuring out that I am a planner, OK? So, I know if I don't get my license, erm I will give it two years...erm.' (P3)

Superordinate theme 2: Acculturation

Participants describe the implications of sociocultural change, strategies for acculturation and the impact on their well-being.

Social acceptance and relationships. Building social relationships appears essential for safeguarding participants against a sense of loneliness and isolation, while meeting the need for social acceptance:

'When you come to a community and you put yourself out there and you start connecting with people, just on any level, you know, just start connecting, it's amazing in this country, not just in my community.' (P2)

'If I don't get something to where I have a core group of good, good friends and stuff like that, which I would say within two to three years I may go back.' (P3)

'Erm, I think if I hadn't have met ... so... met and made so many friends, if I wouldn't have had family here, erm... I might not have settled as well.' (P1)

Community and belonging. Participants' choices of communities are expressed as extensions of their bicultural identities:

'Some days I'm like whatever, I'm just going to wear this and other days I'm like, yeah OK, I'll choose for this you know... cover this and wear a sweater and whatever. So, I guess it's got me more mindful, you know, just because the ... the... in the community people are more mindful of that.' (P2)

'With nine-inch nails, erm you know it's, it's very eclectic up here.' (P3)

'Erm... it's a lovely area, it's got everything within a three or four-minute walk, erm and that's, you know they're all things that... that er that combine to make... to make moving country a success.' (P1)

Social and cultural diversity. Participants describe a sense of awareness, acceptance and appreciation of cultural and religious diversity, both in their chosen communities and in wider society:

'So, the ... it's like the culture understands that a huge amount of people, if not most, are immigrants.' (P2)

'When you're here, of course you're with other religions, other way of life, but here just seems a little bit more normal for me. So, I mean it's a lot of fun.' (P3)

'I... I live in an area that is full of... of young people, erm... of the whole spectrum of observance.' (P1)

Cultural duality. Participants suggest an ongoing process of integrating two cultural identities:

'Yeah... so I have... I do have two homes and it is still... it is my previous home, but this is my current home. And this home is nicer than the other.' (P1)

'They still have this there, they put some of their stuff in storage and they've moved to, you know. So, they made it like a temporary kind of a move...' (P2)

'I just feel normal, I don't feel on... on guard. Erm... of course things... on guard here a little bit different than other areas but it just feels normal.' (P3)

Language barrier. Limited fluency in spoken and written Hebrew impacts participant's career choices, navigation of everyday life and the process of internalising a new cultural identity:

'I wanted a job in English because although I speak Ivrit [modern Hebrew] erm, my Ivrit is not good enough if... It's fine for everyday conversation, but not in a work environment (P1) even getting the job as a... and an assistant I didn't go get a job in a *gan* [kindergarten] here erm, because I don't have the Hebrew enough.' (P2) b

'But I really wanted to er understand the culture, and in order to do that really, you kinda have to know something of the language.' (P2)
'So, for me, and you know nothing was in English, nothing's erm you know that easy.' (P3)

Superordinate theme 3: Transcendence

Participants describe determination, wanting to remain fiercely independent, overcoming practical and emotional challenges, and finding ways of coping.

Managing bureaucracy. Participants each describe navigating the bureaucratic process of *Aliyah*:

'From that point of making the decision to go through the Jewish Agency and Nefesh b'Nefesh [Jewish relocation agency] to start the process, erm, one thing after another inexplicably started falling into place, so things that could have been just so difficult weren't.'(P2)

'All the expected bureaucracy, erm that I thought I would encounter, actually went particularly smoothly, so I didn't have a rough ride with all the different offices. I wasn't sent from pillar to post like I was the first time I came...' (P1)

'A lot of other *olim* that are having a lot of issues but... but for me I think there was really no big surprises' (P3)

Self-reliance and independence. Participants all express their sense of independence through mobility and employment as essential to successful immigration:

'I think soon as I can get my driver's license then I can... get out of here, get a little bit more independence that will really jelly some things up.' (P3)

'I was going to give it eighteen months to find work. Erm...and then I might have had to reconsider the whole, the whole, the whole erm *Aliyah* programme.' (P1)

'I... I began trying to supplement my income because I knew OK, I only have a few more years of this and then it's, I'm on my own you know.' (P2).

Positive coping. Participants express feelings of joy, gratitude and appreciation of their new lives, whilst simultaneously acknowledging distress and practising self-compassion:

'I would talk to my friend, the friend that lives here from [US home town] and she was good at er... she was good at kinda talking me off the ledge... I was never on the ledge, but you know she was good at like bringing back to reality and helping me to you know unfog my glasses, to see you know, what's ...what's really here you know.' (P2)

'I'm willing to give it a go and erm I, I see... I try and see the best in everything. Er...not everything is wonderful, but if you, if you look for the best bits, erm that helps.' (P1)

'So for me it's just… gosh… it's everything. Like right now I can hear the jackals in the mountains and they just sound beautiful to me. So, it's just the little things you know that really make me happy, so… so yeah.' (P3)

Freedom and fun. The *Aliyah* experience appears to reawaken participants' sense of freedom and the desire to experience fun:

'So we're riding a camel to Woodstock, you know, of the of the crazy hippy generation which I love which is a lot like this kibbutz is to, you know the twenty-second century.' (P3)

'And I am like a fifteen-minute drive to the beach er… and I can go any time I want and I never take it for granted.' (P1)

'Erm, getting up in the morning and looking out my window and seeing the Judean hills, you know [laughs] just like, like, yeah, just like, it's just simple things just blow me away… I'm going grocery shopping … and I'm in Israel … I'm going into the mall to buy some shoes, and I'm in Israel, wow… I'm just driving along, and I'm stuck in traffic, and I'm in Israel. (P2)

Superordinate theme 4: Intrinsic identity

The ability to make sense of relocation and adapt to a new sociocultural identity is expressed as deeply rooted in participants' internal narratives and past experiences.

Familial influence.   Narratives around their family backgrounds strongly influence participants' relocation decision-making processes:

'My whole childhood and my whole education, my whole social environment has always been with a connection with Israel and the Jews and my community both there, not so much here because it works differently here. Erm…. so really it would have been very surprising had I have not wanted to er, to make *Aliyah* for the second time.' (P1)

'And I have other relatives that went west on the stage… on the stage coach, covered wagons you know and went West and tried… so I have like pioneer in my family from way back.' (P2)

'I think the big thing is my parents also travelled. So, in the beginning being a young child and doing what the Kennedy's did and all the travel and when we travelled, we stayed for months.' (P3)

Self-perception and self-worth.   Participants describe their perception of themselves in relation to others, whilst expressing doubt about their self-worth:

'I have sometimes when I'm down, when I get like, when I can't see the light at the end of the tunnel, erm, but I'd say for most of the time, I'm a pretty glass half full kind of person… yeah.' (P2)

I don't know I just don't take, I don't like to have arguments, I don't like confrontation, erm… so quite often I will just go along with whatever, just so not to upset anybody or not to offend anybody.' (P1)

'Erm so yeah, I'm an oxymoron as you might say, I really, really am. It keeps people on their toes [being an oxymoron] I think so it's kind of fun watching people…' (P3)

Religion and spirituality. Religion and spirituality are key factors affecting the decision to make *Aliyah*, whether based in Judaism, Zionism, idealism, or a sense of a spiritual self:

> 'My background was in Christianity. It was in erm… it was kind of a long journey… and erm continually was just seeking kind of… the way I feel like I was looking for truth. Erm and yeah, looking for truth, authenticity, real, erm real faith.' (P2)

> 'Emotionally, erm… every time I hear Hatikvah [Israeli National Anthem, literal meaning, The Hope] I cry, erm… If I hear the song at a wedding, I am Eshkachech Yerushalayim [if I forget thee, oh Jerusalem], then that makes me, makes me cry.' (P1)

> 'Very much into the earth, very earthy people… Erm very much into spiritual … er you know the spiritual way of how they feel, how they think, is a lot like my thinking too at the same time.' (P3)

Superordinate theme 5: Purpose and meaning

Participants describe becoming part of Israeli society as giving them a new sense of purpose and meaning, striving for new goals.

Dream fulfilment. *Aliyah* is expressed as the fulfilment of a long-term dream, each having considered relocation for many years:

> 'I decided in my heart really, that I was gonna live here someday erm, and that I was gonna be Jewish. That being said, it, obviously it took till 2015 for that to actually happen so [laughs] er.. but yeah.' (P2)

> 'I think as a… I've always wanted to come here. Erm, I had experience before as a young child being here and always wondering why I was going back.' (P3)

> 'Well the fact that I'm here … that's… that's the number one positive. Erm… the fact that I still don't believe that I'm here, erm.' (P1)

Contribution, helping, and organising. Living a meaningful life in Israel translates for all participants into a sense of needing to contribute, to give back to society:

> 'I wanna do some voluntary work because it's one thing that's very big for me is to be able to give back to Israel as much as possible… I'll volunteer for the lone soldier programme, the young er soldiers that come over here and serve but they're from you know England or the United States…' (P3)

> 'I didn't want to come on a potential 20-year holiday. Not… I couldn't afford a twenty-year holiday nice as it might have been, erm and I felt that I wanted to contribute something… to… to… to the society to… and for my own self-esteem.' (P1)

> It's important to me to… to invest in the next generation you know. And I, any way that I can do that is just awesome. So this… so, for the time I was investing in my own kids and now, you know I can invest in these kids, at this age.' (P2)

Refuge and security. All participants express a sense of Israel as a refuge, revealing an underlying feeling of safety, unprecedented in their birth nations:

'It's being home. It's my home. It's my… it's the home that I have in my heart, erm… it's the home of the Jewish people erm… and I just feel… I just feel that this is where I should be.' (P1)

'Wow… Erm I just feel whole again, I just… It's so hard to just explain. I can breathe… breathe fresh air, erm… erm… erm… yeah it's just… it's just and unusual experience, it really, really is.' (P3)

'And so you have a whole country of people that their go to is… I got your back, OK?' (P2)

DISCUSSION

The current study explored the phenomenon of *Aliyah* from a cross-cultural and positive psychological perspective, from within the framework of IPA, as lived experienced (Smith, 2015). As such, emergent themes evolved directly from the data, encompassing the impact of relocation on cultural identity, past lived experiences, current emotional states, and internal representations which were interlaced throughout the participants' narratives. Subordinate themes were interconnected rather than discrete and had time not been limited, further analysis may have facilitated greater thematic consolidation. Nonetheless, emergent themes as reported revealed some distinctive concepts supporting both the concept of *Aliyah* as a positive psychological intervention, aiding cross-cultural adaptation. Participants described separate, yet conceptually overlapping experiences of awareness of the difficulties of sociocultural adaptation to Israeli life, yet all expressed a sense of newfound freedom, belonging, meaning, rediscovery, reinvention and reconnection with the essence of self. Despite sometimes frustrating bureaucracy, relocation was framed from a positive perspective, with a sense of automatic acceptance by the host nation, gratitude for the ability to openly identify as Jewish, whether religiously observant or not, a sense of relief, refuge and security and relatively little culture shock (Ward, 2008; Weiss & Berger, 2012).

All participants demonstrated positively focused coping mechanisms and behaviours which enabled resilient coping, such as learning to self-soothe, demonstrating self-compassion, expressing gratitude, and recognising despite encountering difficulties, a continual sense of accomplishment (Neff, 2011, Bonanno et al., 2011). Finding purpose and meaning, in both personal and work settings may all have helped participants mediate responses to both unexpected and everyday dilemmas (Wong, 2013). As reported in previous research, participants' self-perception and ability to accept cross-cultural differences impacted social integration more than language proficiency (Amit & Bar-Lev, 2015). Furthermore, as supported by Quéniart and Charpentier's (2012) qualitative study of women aged 65 and older, the current study contradicted Western societal preconceptions of older women as facing dependence and frailty. All participants expressed the intention to continue to live autonomous, active and meaningful lives, demonstrating a sense of positive aging and rediscovering the essence of themselves as women (Valliant, 2008).

Relocation was considered by all participants within the context of the life journey, as a continuation of their story, through making sense of the past and planning the future, rather than a new chapter. The reassessment of the need for hands-on parenting engendered a sense of absolution from maternal guilt, with the knowledge that adult children were living independent lives. Modern technology allowed for remote parenting for Participants 1 and 2, whereas Participant 3 described her release from the somewhat parental constraints of her military career and reconnection with her sense of freedom and creativity (Remennick, 2015).

Echoing Erikson's (1994) life cycle theory, proposing that for adults in their fifties to mid-sixties, the focus is on caring for others, participants expressed a desire to contribute to a new generation and a

sense of reassessment of what is important for the future. All participants decisions were shaped by internal representations of their life stories, when considering their relationships with the self and with others (McAdams, 2001). Familial influences, patterns and childhood expectations were expressed through often judgemental, conflicted and often self-critical inner voices. Nevertheless, as suggested by Seery et al., (2010), personal resources developed through childhood struggles may have facilitated the development a new bi-cultural identity, so that as adults, participants continued to evolve strategies to increase self-esteem and build on positive emotion, even whilst simultaneously experiencing negative emotion and periods of self-doubt.

Previous studies have suggested that particularly for immigrants aged over fifty, physical health and social resilience, a separate but related concept to resilience in everyday life situations, may support positive adaptation (Amit, 2008; Amit & Litwin, 2010; Friedland et al., 2005). Participants in the current study described their need for social inclusion as paramount to their continued well-being. Nevertheless, hedonic happiness alone, fleeting pleasures, were not enough for the participants to feel that they were living their best life, even though relocation enabled a sense of freedom and fun. The need for eudaimonic happiness; flourishing through a life of meaning, purpose and self-actualisation, was evident in all three participants' narratives, demonstrated through active contribution to others, whether by volunteering, engaging in meaningful employment, or supporting the development of future generations (Ryan et al., 2013).

Strengths and limitations

While every effort was made to recruit a homogenous sample, cultural differences between participants from the UK and US were noted. Participant 1 was a returning immigrant, which may have been advantageous and socioeconomic disparities between participants were evident. Nonetheless, on analysis, the primary researcher felt that the homogeneity of the sample was uncompromised by these factors. Participants' responses provided an abundance of rich data, suggesting not only that interview questions did not overtly lead the participants' responses, but that despite their differences, they expressed commonality of meaning of the experience of relocation. The primary researcher's sociocultural similarity to the participants may have influenced participants' responses, however, participants may have felt more inclined to openness, given the nature of some of their disclosures. Overall, the study positively focused on the exploration of meaning of Aliyah for three women of similar ages, who shared life experiences through relocating to Israel at this stage of life. The convergence of themes elicited from the data suggested that though the nature of IPA is idiographic, there were similarities in the Aliyah experiences across the sample and as such, meaning can be derived from the findings for this demographic.

CONCLUSION

This study gives the current demographic a voice while exploring cross-cultural adaption from a positive psychological viewpoint. Findings suggest there would be merit in exploring the experience of a younger demographic of younger immigrants who are currently offered greater opportunities for integration into Israeli society and men of the same demographic as the current study. However, cross-cultural positive psychological research is currently lacking not only in Aliyah studies, but in the wider body of immigration research, therefore further exploration is also warranted across other immigrant groups. The positive perception of Aliyah contributed to participants' resilience and increased sense of well-being. However, whilst expressing a profound sense of meaning, freedom, gratitude, reinvention of and reconnection with self, participants also described challenges with developing social acceptance, gaining meaningful employment and building social networks, all of which were essential for continued well-being. Despite possessing a multitude of transferable skills developed in their birth countries participation in state sponsored immigration, employment and education programmes is currently

aimed largely at younger people or families, creating a need for greater. In summary, the offering of understandings from the women who participated in this study may underpin the exploration of the development of a range of positively focused mentoring, coaching, education and employment programmes, to support acculturation for this and other immigrant communities.

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