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Blanket assertions that immigrants remain closely tied to their homelands and only partly integrate are questioned in a new study funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

Researchers led by Dr Caroline Nagel of Loughborough University asked Arab community activists in Britain and the United States to share their views on citizenship, integration and multiculturalism. Questions included whether citizenship mattered to them, how they identified themselves, and where they considered 'home' to be. Those interviewed tended to see themselves as members of multiple communities and to express attachment to their countries of origin. But they also valued the rights and security offered by their adopted lands, especially given that many had fled civil war, political repression, or statelessness.

Dr Nagel said: "People spoke frequently of a sense of duty and responsibility toward their adopted country, the need to follow its rules and regulations and, perhaps most importantly, to 'give back' to the society which had provided haven and opportunity."

Interviews took place with activists in cities with sizeable Arab-origin populations –

Los Angeles, San Francisco, Washington DC and Detroit in the United States, and London, Birmingham, Sheffield and Liverpool in Britain.

A great deal of activism in these communities – including charity work, cultural and arts organisations, and political groups – reflected continued identification with the Arab world. But the study also revealed that not all those questioned were able, or willing, to maintain close links with the Arab world.

Many, in fact, were focussing their energies on building communities and social political networks in the localities where they had settled. While activists were deeply concerned with issues relating to the Arab world, they often saw these as being 'solved' through activities directed at more local, and often non-Arab, audiences. Dr Nagel said: "Politicians often place responsibility for 'self-segregation' and extremism on community leaders and institutions. So we felt it important to allow activists to tell us their understandings of community, citizenship, and integration, and to explore how organisations foster particular identities and forms of participation."

Many participants in the study described themselves as encouraging members of their communities to integrate – that is, to become actively involved and more visible in their countries of settlement, to know their neighbourhoods and cities, and not to live as 'foreigners'.

People interviewed also suggested that integration hinged on wider acceptance of Arabs and Arabness, as well as of Muslims, which could only be achieved by changing wider public attitudes toward and perceptions of the Arab world and Islam. Participants described integration not as the minority conforming to the majority, but as Dr Nagel said: "Most of our study participants recognise that their lives, and the lives of their children, are 'here' rather than 'there'. They were actively thinking through ideas like citizenship, integration, and multiculturalism and trying to reconcile their sense of responsibility to their places of settlement with their attachments to their

