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Center. Her research is titled “Rites of Return: Festivals of the Living and the Dead in Georgia and Hiroshima.” It is one of three new MARIAL projects that will study family life outside the United States. The others look at family life in Egypt and Barbados. (See related articles on p. 3 and p. 5.)

Mote’s research blends several disciplines, including theology, cultural anthropology, comparative religion and culture, and documentary studies. She will examine the ways that families and faith groups create meaning and pass on values through rituals and practices.

One similarity she will study is how today’s younger generations have to work harder to attend these annual gatherings, because they often live far away from the home place where the reunion occurs. “In both countries generally, and in Hiroshima and Georgia specifically, there has been a remarkable trend on the part of people of working age to take jobs in the cities,“ said Mote. In both places, going home for these events frequently involves traveling many miles, often across the country, and occasionally overseas. While she was woring in Japan, for instance, Mote came home every year for the Shingleroof camp meeting.

At Shingleroof, which is just outside McDonough in Henry County, Georgia, she is joined by four generations of her extended family. Up to sixteen of them stay in the family cabin or “tent” and six to seven more bunk in her cousin’s RV.

More than forty family-owned cabins dot the Shingleroof campground, which was established in 1831. It was started by Methodist circuit riders and coincided with the “laying by” time of the crops before the harvest. Services today are more ecumenical, with Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, and Episcopalians attending. Many are descendants of the original Shingleroof tenters.

Mote, a doctoral student in Emory’s Institute of Liberal Arts, is in the beginning stages of her comparative analysis. Part of her inquiry will focus on what she calls “an identifiable camp meeting religious culture” that has evolved during the past two hundred years. This culture blends religion and family, and it is difficult to articulate or separate the two aspects. “I view it as its own religious culture,” said Mote, a licensed minister with an MDiv from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. She notes, for example, that while many campers regularly attend worship services at home, others almost never go to services at home but wouldn’t miss camp meeting for anything because they grew up with it and cannot imagine not being there.

Noted Mote, “It is replete with all kinds of rituals and foods and a lot of other traditional things that the participants themselves may or may not identify as being religious. But the way that they approach them and the meaning that they derive . . . constitutes a religious culture. And I think the same kind of thing is happening in Obon.”

The pace of life for many people today in the United States and Japan is such that it is difficult to see beyond the pressing demands of each day. In both camp meeting and Obon, Mote says, people willfully choose to resist rush and instead return to ways of living that help them reconnect to those who have gone before. In so doing, they become aware of being in the moment and connected to something bigger than oneself. “The horizontal plane of everyday living intersects with the vertical plane of transcendence, if you will,” said Mote. “People find meaning in that intersection and so they keep going home, keep participating in these rites of return.”