Iliescu became that leading political figure in the country. His rise and his stewardship, however, have left several questions unanswered. Was the change in regime in December 1989 the result of a popular revolution or of a well planned and executed coup by a group of ambitious insiders? Will Iliescu, with the sanction of a presumably free election, keep the basic framework and methods of the Communist regime (minus Ceausescu's worst excesses) or help to build a free and open society? Will he and his colleagues return Romania to the European family of nations? Answers seem anything but clear, either to the Romanian people or to the outside world. But one can do no better, in preparation for watching and understanding events as they unfold, than to read Gilberg's chapters on the Romanian political culture. It is not particularly encouraging to know that the one unifying force that moves both rulers and ruled, as throughout the nation's history, is that of nationalism. Inspiring as it may be, it is no answer to their future problems and those of their neighbors.

John C. Campbell


This is an important study that will elicit strong reactions, both positive and negative, from the many readers it deserves. An anthropologist, Verdery has spent many months on field research in urban and rural areas of Romania. Her work is widely respected by scholars in that country and abroad, and she recognizes the complexities of the society and the difficulties faced by its citizens during and after Ceausescu's rule. The early chapters survey debates among Romanian intellectuals over national identity from the seventeenth century to the present, but the heart of this volume comprises three case studies of quarrels among literary critics, historians and philosophers during the Ceausescu period.

Verdery is fascinated by discourse and the assumptions on which it rests. She points out correctly that intellectual debates not only reflect the politics and ideology of the participants but also have important policy implications. (Certainly in the U.S., for example, a scholar's views on the melting pot-mixing bowl theories of American identity reveal a great deal about that individual's politics and policy priorities.) Verdery argues that under Ceausescu "images of Romanian identity entered into battle . . . [and] perpetuated a Romanian national ideology within an order claiming to be socialist" (p. 3). This occurred because, although intellectuals quarreled over the essence and origins of their nation and what policies would best serve its interests, "nation" and "people" formed "the unquestioned basis for every statement" and "a national ideology was constructed that became hegemonic." No one bothered to ask whether there was "such a thing as 'the Romanian people';" instead the debates "embedded the Nation deeply not just in intellectual and political discourse but also in institutions supporting intellectual and political life" (pp. 70-71). As a result, "the national discourse subdued the Marxist one," and "the outcome ... was
the discursive constitution of a nationalism even more powerful than before" (pp. 314-15).

Another conclusion, reached with regret on Verdery's part, will be disputed by many of her Romanian colleagues: "[I]ntellectuals, even those who considered themselves to be opposing the Party, were serving it by reproducing the national ideology that the Party had incorporated into its rule" (p. 309). Yet she does not criticize Romanian intellectuals, as many in the West have done, for failing to mobilize against the Ceaușescu regime. On the contrary she points out that "to do anything more than they did would have been pure self-destruction" (p. 310). She also indicates that those intellectuals who rejected the arguments of the Party's allies in these intellectual debates — the antiprotochronists (those who rejected arguments that many cultural developments in Romania had actually preceded similar ideas or events in Western Europe), historians such as David Prodan and Alexander Zub, the Noica School of philosophers — helped to "resist the totalization of values and activities at the political center" (p. 312). Nevertheless, her analysis demonstrates the power of nationalism in pre-communist and communist Romania and helps to explain the important role it has come to play in electoral campaigns, public discourse, and policy formulation since the overthrow of Ceaușescu. She fears that socialist "totalization" will be replaced by a national one and urges Romanians "to disrupt the discourse on the Nation with persuasive discourses on pluralism and democracy" (p. 318).

This volume contributes to our understanding of socialist states, of Romania, and of intellectuals in a variety of ways. For example, Verdery shows how the Party's determination to control language and gain "cultural authority," combined with its monopoly on economic resources, set up struggles among "fractions of the cultural elite, differentially empowered within a system of domination that requires and supports the production of culture" (p. 92). Also, because the volume focuses on intermediate levels in Romanian society — how institutions and individual academics responded to central priorities with initiatives to enhance their own support and funding or to defend their territory against encroachment from competing scholars or disciplines — it complements other studies of Romanian politics and society under Ceaușescu which have tended to focus at the top or bottom of the policy process. In addition, the analysis of cultural politics helps to explain the prominent role of intellectuals in the new political processes which have replaced Communist Party rule throughout the former Soviet bloc.

Some anthropologists may criticize Verdery's methodology — textual analysis "within the context of sets of social relations" (pp. 19-20), supplemented by long residence, many interviews and, as she herself observes, "those old ethnographic standbys: intuition, overheard gossip, and rumor" (p. 235). Although her methods may arouse controversy, there is no doubt that few foreign scholars have come to know Romania as well as Verdery. She does underestimate the role of Ceaușescu's personal preferences in shaping Romanian policies, and in criticizing "Western theories of totalitarianism" Verdery does not seem to realize how her own vivid descriptions of competing organizations and overlapping responsibilities — "excessive centralization ... yoked with extreme anarchy," as she puts it