26.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses the rise of social movements with a special emphasis on Latin America, in response to the ongoing process of exclusive (Stiglitz 2002; Salazar 2003), named also regressive globalization (Kaldor/Anheier/Glasius 2003) or globalization of organized violence (Held/Mc Grew 2007). As a result, more than three billion persons, mostly in Third World countries, are living in poverty, lacking basic services, with poor health conditions and few opportunities for dignified jobs and a reduced future. With a greater integration into the world market the gap within and among the countries is growing, above all in Africa and Latin America.

To counter this process, social movements have constructed bottom-up alternatives, not to disturb the social peace, but to raise collective consciousness and livelihood (26.2). Latin America is reviewed as one of the most dynamic regions struggling first against imposed colonialism and later against neoliberalism (26.3). The region has developed self-organizing experiences (MST, the Landless Peasant Movement in Brazil, indigenous organizations in Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru, Central America, and Mexico; Dos Santos 2004, 2005). Recently, leftist Presidents were elected in Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Bolivia, Nicaragua and Ecuador (Boron 2005; Barrera 2005), trying to reduce social inequality and poverty within their countries. However, their success is limited due to complex economic structures of regressive globalization (26.4).

This is illustrated in a case study on the uprising of the Zapatista movement in Mexico after the North American Free Trade Agreement of America (NAFTA) was signed by the United States of America, Canada, and Mexico. They have transformed their armed struggle into a Neo-Zapatista civilian experience, where they are building in autonomous territories an alternative model of socio-political organization (so-called 'Caracoles', Juntas de Buen Gobierno; Diverse Authors 2007), promoting economic justice, cultural dignity, social and political participation, sustainable development, and global solidarity. They have used the internet to communicate and to protect their experience, threatened by opposed landlords, paramilitary, military and governmental forces. The Zapatista movement has also been using the traditional mobilization in the streets combined with public discussion to promote their political model (Juntas de Buen Gobierno), and to reinforce national and international solidarity (26.5).

As globalization is a worldwide process, social movements have been struggling collectively against the imposed exclusive world model, represented by the World Economic Forum in Davos and the G-8. Simultaneously, alternative thinkers and actors have been interchanging theoretical reflections and bottom-up experiences during the World Social Fora (WSF) in Porto Alegre (2001, 2002, and 2004), Mumbai (2003), and Nairobi (2007) and in different sub-regions (26.6). During the first WSF, popular movements organized themselves in the Assembly of Social Movements (ASM), and were able to establish a world agenda for common activities. During an intensive interchange of experiences, they also were exploring alternatives for dignified livelihoods in societies, characterized by enormous social gaps. Their vision of solidarity and justice has opposed the Davos’ paradigm of the world economic elite and its model of exploitation and consumerism that has often been insensitive to social and environmental destruction. Finally, the question will be discussed how social movements have reconceptualized security in a wider sense, taking into account human, gender, and environmental concerns for a plural, peaceful, sustainable and diverse world model (26.7) before the results will be summarized in the concluding section (26.8).
26.2 Globalization, Civil Society, Social Movements, and Altermundism

The history of the economy during the last two centuries offered different opportunities for development (see figure 26.1) among regions and social groups. During this time period, the U.S., Canada, and Oceania increased their GDP more than 25 times, while Europe, due to two world wars and regional conflicts, could not achieve the same results. As the second largest national economy, Japan took off from a lower original accumulation, but through a process of industrialization, education, and high technology was able to increase its initial GDP 40 times. This country has demonstrated the most intensive development process.

Latin America (LA), the Soviet Union, and the rest of Asia started from a lower economic potential. The former Soviet Union had a poor performance, increasing its wealth only six times. Recently, Russia has improved its economic situation, thanks to the extensive hydrocarbon reserves and its well trained population. Due to liberation struggles, neo-colonialism and neoliberalism, LA had a limited development. Using its good years during both world wars, Latin America could multiply its development ten times. During the past three decades of lost development it got stuck and lost part of its previous consolidation, partly due to prevailing neoliberal policies that have been imposed on their governments by IMF, WB, multinational corporations, and globally operating business elites. Only Asia has achieved high economic growth rates that have been supported by high increases in productivity and exports, as well as major investments in education, and have thus opened bright perspectives for this region. Africa is situated in the worst outlook, not only due to its present situation of armed struggles, but also due to longstanding colonial rule, late independence (in most cases after 1960), and neo-colonial control over its natural resources. Today, internal conflicts in multiple countries, desertification processes, famine, and HIV-AIDS are affecting the population in the most productive age, mortgaging the future of Sub-Saharan Africa (Oswald 2005).

These unequal development processes are results of complex factors related to colonial and neo-colonial mechanisms that have been expressed by unequal terms of trade, monopolies and oligopolies, which pursued the extraction of surplus from less developed countries. Independence brought for many Third World countries new threats: their governments and economic elites were often closely allied with multinational interests. Independence brought for many Third World countries new threats: their governments and economic elites were often closely allied with multinational business (see dependencia theory: Marini 1973; Dos Santos 1978). In many cases, they passed laws favouring these economic interests, often against those of the majority of their population.