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The Invention of Indigenous Architecture

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What is indigenous architecture? An example that might come to mind is the traditional German farmstead, nestled in the agrarian landscape or perhaps part of an old village, as is suggested in an early twentieth-century photograph of Golenhofen (figure 10.1). The farmhouses of this picturesque village feature half-timbered facades, clipped gable roofs, dormers, and a variety of pitched roof shapes. Yet despite exhibiting such age-old German building styles, the entire village was meticulously planned and built from scratch just a few years before it was photographed for publication in the magazine *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration* (German Art and Decoration) in 1906.[1] The ensemble encompassed not only farmsteads but also a church, a school, workers' houses, an inn, a bakery, a poorhouse, and even a small public laundry and a fire station, built with material and technologies imported from Berlin. Golenhofen was located in Prussia's eastern, Polish-dominated province of Posen; the village is now in Poland, and bears the name Golęczewo. But at the close of the nineteenth century, this seemingly timeless German hamlet was part of a rural modernization and territorial control project.

Even though indigenous architecture—architecture of, for, and by people native

Fig. 10.1 The village of Golenhofen in the province of Posen, designed by Paul Fischer. Source: "Eine deutsche Dorf-Anlage in den Ostmarken," *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration* 18, April–September 1906, 536.

to an area—conjures up a sense of timelessness, it is itself not a timeless concept. It was invented in the nineteenth century, and would have important repercussions in the one to follow. By the time Golenhofen was built, there was a well-established discourse in Germany about what architecture was considered native. Even though intellectual elites tended to reserve the term "native" for non-Europeans they considered inferior, they approached rural communities in European provinces with similar assumptions about the innate connection between architecture, land, and racialized notions of human difference. While anthropologists looked for indigeneity in the colonized other, folklorists, as they would come to call themselves, tended to approach the material culture of rural Europe in a like-minded manner in which anything from dress to building came to index ethnic identity. As the notion of the nation gained increasing importance in the nineteenth century, locating the indigenous within one's own society was not only important in order to define that society as modern, but to be grounded and communal in that modernity.

In the course of the nineteenth century, architecture became ever more intensely charged with the task of representing human difference in terms of race. Architecture became part of a powerful set of "invented traditions" used by elites to bolster national pride and the supremacy of whiteness.[2] Imperial Germany is a particularly instructive context to examine how these anxieties about race shaped the discourse of indigenous architecture. Germany lagged behind in the formation

of a national consciousness when compared to England, France, or the United States. The region's multiethnic population and its extreme fragmentation in territorial sovereignty challenged a sense of nationhood both before and after German unification in 1871. Beyond these challenges in the construction of nationhood, Germany also experienced rapid urbanization and mass migration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which propelled desires for belonging and rootedness. The concept of *Heimat* (homeland) and its architectural productions such as at Golenhofen were crucial to German nation-building as much as they were strategies to cope with modernization and globalization.[3]

Despite much scholarship that unpacks this cultural and political role of architecture, scholarship on the twentieth century has often continued to accept architecture's claims to represent ethnic identity at face value. This tends to mask the history of modernism as the self-evident spread of "international" architectural principles, forms, and styles. Even the proposition of what has been termed "critical regionalism"—a combination of International Style aesthetics with "local" or "regional" elements—rests on an assumed direct relationship between architecture, ethnic identity, and geographic environment. This assumption becomes particularly problematic for the history of architecture in formerly colonized parts of the world. Up until today, indigenous claims remain central to anti-colonial struggle, and architecture can play a significant role in such struggles. The concept of indigeneity has indeed been mobilized by colonized peoples in the effort to attain self-rule and continues to shape post-independence nationalism, particularly in Africa. But history shows that the kind of work that the idea of indigenousness performs when applied to architecture has not always been emancipatory. Indigenous architecture was promoted and produced by metropolitan elites before it was mobilized by colonized peoples for their own purposes.[4] At the time of Golenhofen's construction, Germany was, after all, both a nation-state under construction, and an empire with colonial ambition both overseas and in Europe. Its architecture was not only an invented tradition for domestic purposes; it was also an instrument of colonial oppression.

Heimat and Lebensraum

In his bestselling *Kulturarbeiten* volumes, published between 1901 and 1917, architect Paul Schultze-Naumburg argued that to protect Germany from the unsettling consequences of industrialization and urbanization, architecture needed to be what was called *bodenständig*—literally rooted in the soil. Styles needed to be native, just like plants, to their environment rather than imported from abroad; he was especially critical about the use of Italian renaissance and French styles in Germany's burgeoning industrial cities. "Rooted" architecture, by contrast, would safeguard the Heimat—an idea that was central to the *Heimatschutz* movement,

the environmental and architectural preservation movement that Schultze-Naumburg helped found in 1904. Germans, like other Europeans, made categorical distinctions between their own native populations and the natives elsewhere. The term *eingeboren* (native) was used for Africans, while Heimat and *Bodenständigkeit* were reserved for those individuals indigenous to Germany. Architectural historians have tended to translate bodenständig as contextual or regional, but "indigenous" is in fact a more illuminating translation in this context, since its usage allows one to critically approach the imperial distinction between colonizer and colonized. Despite its romantic provenance and anti-modern overtones, Bodenständigkeit—and the aesthetics associated with it—were fundamental to the development of modern architecture.[5]

Schultze-Naumburg was not the first and certainly not the only one at the time to focus on architecture indigenous to Germany. In 1894, the Berlin Architects' Association (Vereinigung Berliner Architekten) had already begun commissioning a systematic study of the German farmhouse, leading to the publication in 1906 of the encyclopedic book *Das Bauernhaus im Deutschen Reiche und in seinen Grenzgebieten* (figure 10.2).[6] Such studies of German building traditions were part and parcel of the rise of folklore studies, which developed first in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Since its founding in 1863, the Österreichische Museum für Kunst und Industrie had been exhibiting regional arts and crafts objects to represent the multinational identity of the empire, and during the 1870s, this focus was expanded to include farm buildings.[7] In contrast to the acknowledgment of its multiethnic regional character in Austria-Hungary, however, folk art in Germany was more often cast as naturally unified.[8] Just as the notion of a local Heimat contributed directly to German nationalism, as scholars like Celia Applegate have demonstrated, so was local folk art—whether from the Schwarzwald or Thuringia—understood as a direct expression of the German people, or *Volk*.[9]

Folklorists such as Robert Mielke, cofounder of the Heimatschutz movement, and Oscar Schwindrazheim, who founded the association Volkskunst in Hamburg in 1889, considered folklore to spring from the countryside and thus not from the city. Their unspoken assumption was that rural buildings were more indigenous than urban ones. This rural ideal relied on the romantic intellectual tradition of Johann Gottfried Herder and the work of Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl, one of the founders of German *Volkskunde* (ethnology). In his four-volume *Die Naturgeschichte des Volkes als Grundlage einer deutschen Social-Politik*, written between 1851 and 1869—the most famous volume of which is entitled *Land und Leute* (Land and People)—Riehl emphasized the essential German-ness of the landscape. The book contrasted the agrarian landscapes of France with the forest landscapes of Germany, and found in the latter the uniqueness of its national character. Riehl

Fig. 10.2 Cover of *Das Bauernhaus im Deutschen Reiche und in seinen Grenzgebieten* (Dresden: Verlag von Gerhard Kühtmann, 1906).

understood German culture, more than any, as anchored in the land, and thus organically grown through nature and history. His anti-urban and anti-modern ideology had a long-lasting influence on German intellectual culture in the second half of the nineteenth century.[10]

By the turn of the twentieth century, through the work of Schultze-Naumburg, Mielke, and others, these romantic ideas had developed into a more deterministic mapping of German architecture onto the national territory. Architectural forms, styles, and details were systematically projected onto territory in order to suggest that racial identity was rooted in the land, and that local homelands could be subsumed under the umbrella of the German "race." At the same time, the folkloric celebration of Germany's man-made landscapes, by Heimatschutz advocates and reform movements such as the *Wandervogel*, was not foreign to imperialist ambitions, and in many ways correlated with emerging geopolitical theories. The concept of Lebensraum (literally, living space), developed by the geographer Friedrich Ratzel, best encapsulates these imperialist ambitions. Lebensraum was defined as "the geographical surface area required to support a living species at its current population size and mode of existence."[11] As an evolutionary rationality of environment, Lebensraum impacted older concepts such as Heimat, which were based on more static connections between people and the land, as formulated by Riehl earlier in the century. Ratzel's concept thus signaled a revolution in how space was understood: social and political space was no longer essentially fixed but could now be conceived of as a vital category.[12]

Lebensraum is one of the most well-known German political concepts of the twentieth century. After the treaty of Versailles, radical conservatives harnessed it to argue for the establishment of a new German empire, and the Nazis subsequently employed it to legitimize the invasion of Poland. But its political impact was felt even before that; the concept was formulated in 1901 to legitimize German settler colonialism. Ratzel's concept was a way of extending biological principles to geography, casting the Darwinian struggle for life as, essentially, a struggle for space.[13] By conceptualizing the state as an organism rooted in the soil, he suggested that just like plants spreading their roots, a people needed to expand its territory or die. This idea, of environment as a category of life itself, resonated with a range of turn-of-the-century reformers, including Heimatschutz advocates. Opposed to turning to the widespread urbanization, industrialization, and internationalization of the time, and a corresponding instrumentalist view of nature and human society, these advocates held up biology as the guiding principle for social and political affairs. And it was this kind of naturalist nativism that undergirded the deployment of indigenous architecture in the German Empire—from the Prussian countryside to sub-Saharan Africa.

Systematic Settlement

Golenhofen was a rural modernization project of the Prussian Settlement Commission. Between its establishment in 1886 and 1918, this state organization settled close to 150,000 Germans in farming villages in Prussia's eastern provinces of Posen and West Prussia. Around the time of Polish independence in 1918, the Settlement Commission proclaimed to have built 57 churches, 479 schools, and more than 700 other public buildings, in addition to thousands of farmsteads.[14] Central to such "internal colonization" efforts, as Germans called them, was the aim of strengthening German national identity in the eastern provinces. Resettling German farmers and workers was a way to oppress Polish people, and this goal was explicitly formulated by the Settlement Commission at its outset.[15] Polish resistance only grew in the following decades, in part as a response to the work of the Prussian Settlement Commission. Land prices skyrocketed because Polish farmers were eager to buy back land from German settlers, which led to new legislation in 1908 to allow the direct expropriation of Polish farmers.[16] But the oppression ultimately failed; it only further heightened Polish nationalism. In the period 1896–1914, the Polish anti-colonial movement gained 181,437 hectares of land.[17]

German officials cast Polish farmers as backwards, their agricultural techniques as inefficient, and their architecture as primitive. Tropes of colonial ideology thus seem readily applicable to the resettlement project. Yet despite some parallels with overseas colonialism and the increasingly racialized understanding of German-Polish differences, the category of race worked quite differently in Prussia than it did, for instance, in the empire's African colonies. Although Germans saw the Poles as inferior, they were still incontestably European. Polish people had official citizenship in the Prussian state and there were no interdictions on Polish-German marriages or explicit segregation policies.[18] In fact, the determination of German and Polish nationality was often an ambiguous and contradictory exercise. Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, Prussian statisticians had used linguistic status as the determinant of nationality.[19] Yet, in practice, categorical distinctions between Germans and Poles were often extremely difficult to make—in some regions language was to determine nationhood, while in others "behavior showing adherence to the German state [Staatsgedanken]" was proposed as a supposed determinant.[20] The region's Jews, living mostly in cities, were sadly caught in between German nationalism and its Polish response.

The Prussian Settlement Commission was not solely motivated by an anti-Polish agenda. It was in fact part of a larger set of programs focused on rural modernization. In other parts of Germany, including those without a marked non-German presence, a range of organizations pursued internal colonization as

a way to rationalize rural land use and increase agricultural productivity.[21] The German countryside had been emptying throughout much of the nineteenth century as peasants moved to cities or abroad. German governments responded by launching programs that would repopulate the countryside and expand agricultural productivity. Like other programs, the Prussian Settlement Commission aimed to transform large land holdings into smaller farmsteads. Social as much as it was economic in its aims, this measure would counter rural proletarianization by strengthening the German rural middle class.

Architecture and planning played a key role in this project. Village layouts such as Golenhofen's aimed to create a community of German settlers while providing each farmer with enough land for sustenance and independence. During the first years of the commission's activities, settlers were responsible for building their own farmsteads, using their own skills and building traditions. However, the commission soon took charge of the massive building operations, from the provision of materials to design and construction. The project's chief architect, Paul Fischer, was responsible for the designs. Although he remains virtually unknown in architectural history today—he is not to be confused with the more well-known architect Theodor Fischer—Fischer was well-versed in architectural debates of his time and was particularly drawn to Heimatschutz ideas.[22] In the first half of the 1890s, Fischer pursued an extensive survey of the farmsteads constructed by the first settlers to Prussia, who came from as far as Hungary and the Baltic. A decade into the commission's building experience, Fischer concluded that neither self-building by the farmers nor custom design by his office was ideal. The first method was economically inefficient, and the second led to buildings that were often unsuited to farmers' needs. Consequently, Fischer implemented a new system of building that was both centrally administered and adjustable to local needs and circumstances. The commission's central administration would pay for wages and materials, so building production could be significantly streamlined.[23] At the same time, designs were to be customized by individual estate managers.[24] Such a system required pre-approved, standardized designs, which Fischer compiled in a series of catalogues (figure 10.3).[25] The designs were inspired by his survey of the kinds of structures settling farmers had built for themselves. Fischer understood his work as a process of collecting of Germanic building traditions, inspired by the self-building practices of migrating farmers from lower Saxony and Westfalen to Hungary, mobilized for a rationalized design and construction system.

Reflecting the contemporaneous debates within the Deutscher Werkbund, a German association of architects, designers, industrialists, and artists, Fischer's work was shaped both by a romantic, anti-urban nationalism and the imperative of standardization. In fact, despite the ethos of standardization that underlay the commission's building production, Fischer was adamant about stylistic diversity.

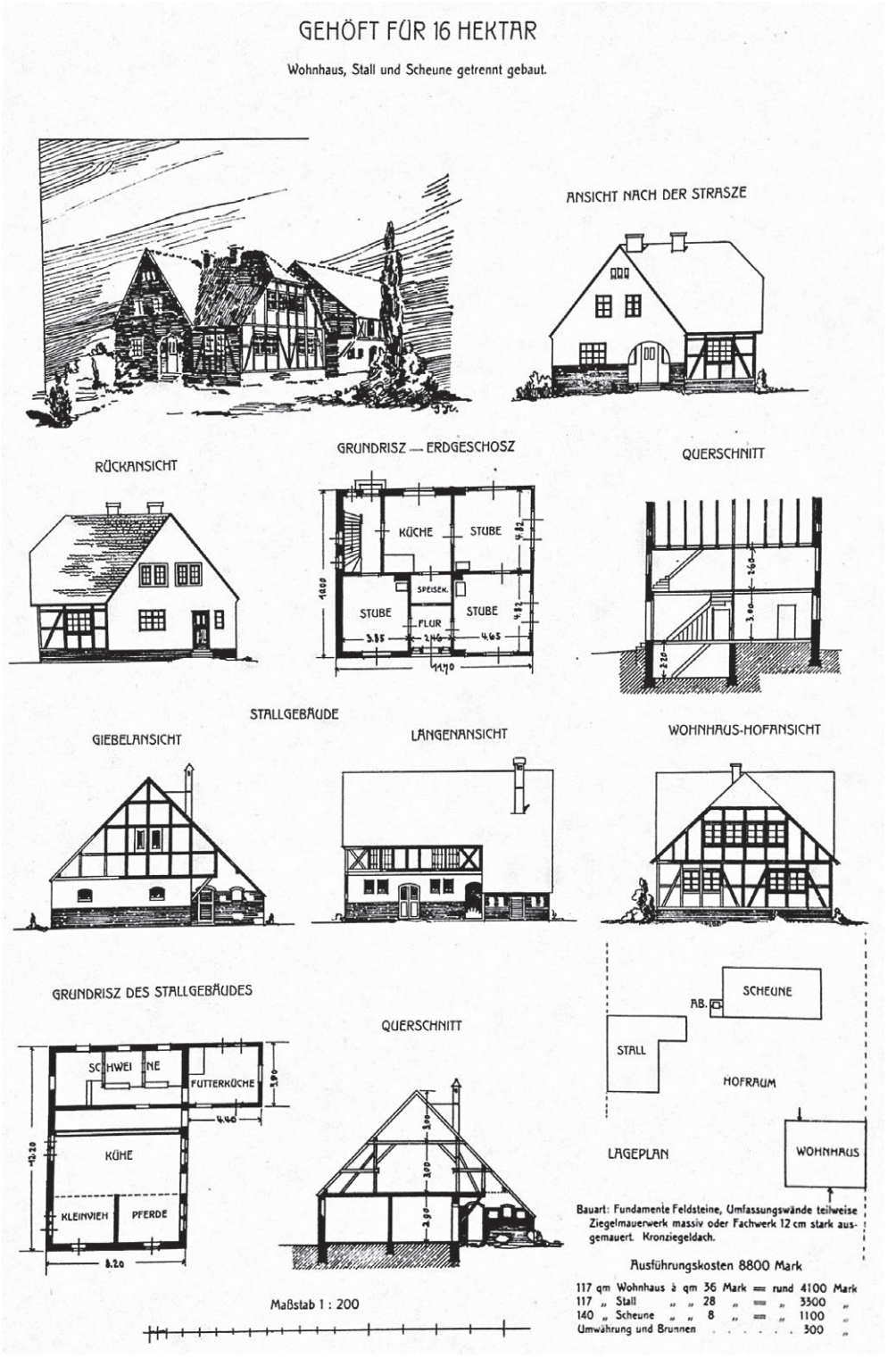

Fig. 10.3 Farmstead design by Paul Fischer. Source: Paul Fischer, *Ansiedlungsbauten in den Provinzen Posen und Westpreußen* (Halle a.S.: Ludwig Hofstetter, 1904), 3.

None of the commission's dozens of churches was the same. The goal of creating a feeling of place by promoting architectural difference reflected the ambitions of Heimatschutz designers. Architectural forms inspired by native traditions—even if these regions were located a thousand kilometers away—would help settlers feel at home. Whether the farmers trying to establish livelihoods in new surroundings cared much for the intricate half-timbering is unclear. Many may in fact have preferred more rudimentary, economical buildings. The ultimate goal of the Prussian Resettlement Program, however, was not simply to build homes, but to reinforce the homeland. This is what informed the creation of a rational system of so-called indigenous architecture that was meant to make centuries of Polish presence in eastern Prussia irrelevant.

Building a New Homeland

Compared with other major European powers, Germany came late not only to the business of nation-building, but also to the colonial project. Only with the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885 did Germany become an imperial power and begin to officially acquire colonial possessions in Africa (now Namibia, Tanzania, Cameroon, and Togo), the Pacific (New Guinea and Samoa), and China (port concessions). In these overseas colonies, architecture was similarly used to construct a homeland, and building was accompanied by violent practices of dispossession and annihilation. This was particularly true in Namibia. Soon after its formal colonization in 1884, armchair colonists began to portray German Southwest Africa as an ideal territory on which to expand German Lebensraum. While the region's existing polities had participated in capitalist exchange for centuries, and local societies had been reshaped by long-distance trade and migration from the Cape Colony, the relatively short period of German colonization (until 1915) constituted a radical moment of rupture—not so much for bringing the region into the dynamics of global capitalism than for ruthless annihilation and the systematic dispossession of African land and wealth.[26] After the genocidal war with Namibia from 1904 to 1908, the German colonial state aimed to transform those who had survived into a landless proletariat, to destroy their culture and political organization, and to force them into serving as a disciplined labor force for white employers.

While white settlement remained nevertheless sparse, and fewer than 15,000 Germans moved to Namibia during the German colonial period (compare this with the 150,000 settlements in eastern Prussia alone), settler colonialism in Namibia constituted a radical restructuring in the ownership, use, meaning, and construction of the landscape. As they moved to this region's dry highlands and deserts, German settlers relied not only on African forced and wage labor, but at least initially, on local building techniques. The architecture of the region's existing

peoples included domed huts, first represented in early nineteenth-century drawings. Germans called these *pontoks*, to mean any dwelling type built by and for natives. In addition, the settlers adopted the Afrikaans word *hartbeeshuis* to typify the dwellings built by groups of mixed African and European descent. Just like their builders, German colonists understood such dwellings as a hybrid type, built using "native" techniques but essentially "European" in form.[27] By reducing architectural form to racial type, colonists denied both the variety and historical change of dwelling cultures in precolonial Namibia.

In a pamphlet distributed to the first settlers, the German Colonial Society explained how to use such native building techniques. For the roofs, the pamphlet suggested weaving together small trunks and twigs, rather than using corrugated metal.[28] Not only was corrugated metal expensive to import from Europe, it also collected the intensive desert heat. Over the following decades, however, corrugated metal—together with all sorts of building elements such as windows and doors—was increasingly imported for roof construction and became the colony's standard roof material. Similarly, for masonry walls, builders gradually replaced local stone with factory-produced cement blocks as they became locally available. Despite the growing influence of such modern building materials, or perhaps because of it, Germans increasingly insisted on the Bodenständigkeit of their new architecture.

In the colonial imagination, farmsteads were often thought of as naturally rooted in their new homeland—just as they would have been in Germany. This idea of natural rooting was suggested in drawings and paintings, such as those by Erich Mayer.[29] But it was more than just imagined or represented. Architecture effectively served to transform the colony into a new, German homeland. Half-timbering and clipped gable roofs constituted often self-conscious strategies to emphasize German-ness in a geographical and climatic environment that continued to estrange and threaten colonial settlers. Industrial corrugated metal roofing was made to emulate complicated roof forms and details, including turrets, clipped gables, and dormers. Despite the fact that these could be historically found across much of northern and central Europe, and had more to do with the European popularity of the neo-Tudor style than with historical German farmhouses, colonists understood these elements to be essentially German. Moreover, these elements were often given a new function. Dormers rarely functioned as dormers, for example; they were instead used to allow natural roof ventilation and to mitigate the considerable heat built up under the metal roofs. The veranda became a dominant feature of rural architecture, and could be seen in rudimentary farm buildings as well as in more extravagant, architect-designed farmsteads.[30] Built across colonial Africa and South Asia, the veranda was inserted in a growing stylistic vocabulary of German Southwest African architecture. Despite its quasi-global spread,

the veranda came to be portrayed as a new element of specifically German architecture for the new Heimat.[31]

Of course, the creation of a new homeland was hardly a matter of architectural form or style alone. It required systematic efforts to physically dispossess Africans and segregate their bodies in time and space. Control of the colonized population entailed creating enclaves, building fences, and enforcing curfews.[32] The building of white settlements such as Windhoek also entailed the creation of native settlements, locations, or *werften*—a form of segregation that was later formalized in the South African apartheid system.[33] In this process, the pontok was no longer understood as indigenous architecture, but rather came to shelter a landless class of refugees in marginalized enclaves or, during the Namibian war, in concentration camps.[34]

Since the beginning of German colonial rule, African resistance had prompted intensive militarization, which continued to shape the production and meaning of the Namibian built landscape at large. German colonization had left a sprawl of military infrastructure, in particular forts, across the country, especially along the line that would become to delineate the "Police Zone," as the Germans called it, demarcating the southern two-thirds of the country where colonial control could be maintained.[35] But militarization shaped civilian architecture as well. This was perhaps most striking in the crenellations that appeared on many private residential buildings. Housing projects for officers adopted the layouts and sometimes even the massing of forts.[36] Even though such military architectural elements might just as well be found in the residential architecture of Berlin's leafy suburbs at this time, they attained a meaning particular to the colonial context of German Southwest Africa.

The prison of the coastal town of Swakopmund, designed by Otto Ertl and finished in 1909, suggests how militarization and Bodenständigkeit collided in this context.[37] Like other prisons, the building was organized by strict segregation, with separate entries and cells for white and nonwhite prisoners. With a mastery unusual for the colonial builders in the empire's overseas colonies, this building displayed many of the stylistic tropes of the Heimatschutz movement, replete with medieval-looking cornerstones, half-timbering, turrets, and protruding gables (figure 10.4). The architect's idea for the prison was that all its building materials should be "appropriate to the local climatic conditions," and therefore he chose ashlar stone masonry.[38] This aim seemed to be lifted from Schultze-Naumburg's ideas about Bodenständigkeit as outlined in the *Kulturarbeiten* volumes. Yet in a colonial context where architectural design served to legitimize the dispossession of exactly those who had indigenous rights to the soil, the cruel irony of these ambitions seems to have gone entirely unnoticed.

The modern invention of indigenous architecture, foundational to the

Fig. 10.4 Prison of Swakopmund, designed by Otto Ertl, 1909. Source: Cupers, 2014.

Heimatschutz movement, was not only an instrument of cultural reform or environmental preservation in historically German cities and countrysides, but also an instrument of the European colonial project. From Namibia to eastern Prussia, architecture was mobilized to colonize land and to reinforce German imperial reign. Paradoxically, the accompanying architectural styles used the idea of indigenousness against those who had indigenous rights to the land. In the German empire, indigenous architecture was not something that was simply found, or even discovered; it was something that needed to be built and imposed. Indigenous architecture was not just about employing the local to build the nation, but about reshaping the local in order to expand empire. As it required a new, unprecedented harnessing of people and materials, empire building entailed an architectural project of indigenizing—of assigning people to specific places, making those people belong to that place, and dispossessing others. For cultural reformers in Germany, architectural indigeneity served as the medium for a new way of life, in touch with nature and tradition. For officials of the Settlement Commission and colonial governments, it allowed for the implantation of a rational system of settlement. For German settlers, it offered the opportunity to feel at home while they were far away. And for Polish landholders and African pastoralists, it was a weapon that enforced their dispossession.