

Gold Rush in the Cold: Russian Far East Expeditions in Russian-American Travel Writing, 1898–1900

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Introduction

At the beginning of the twentieth century both the Russian Empire and the United States experienced considerable social and economic changes, and travel writing of this period on both sides played an important role in cultural interaction and shaping mutual images among readers back home. Russian and English scholars agree that the images formed back then continue to influence mutual perceptions even today (Allen 1988, 74; Zhuravleva 2012, 405–406). However, among many layers of Russian-American travel writing before the First World War the topic of travels to Alaska and the Russian Far East has received little consideration, even though at that point in time both modernizing empires began paying significant attention to the development of their most distant territories, making these regions appealing destinations for explorers, settlers, and travelers.

For the Russian Empire both Siberia and the Far East had primarily strategic and long-term economic value, especially in the wake of political developments in China and rapid industrial development of Japan. At the end of the nineteenth century the Russian government's intentions to develop the region were marked by building the Trans-Siberian railway and encouraging peasant migration to the region (Forsyth 1992, 14–15, 29). Russian statistics show that while in 1885–1892 over 258 thousand settlers moved to Siberia and the Far East combined, throughout the next ten years, 1893–1903, this number quadrupled to 1.2 million (RA 1906, 2–3, 22–23). Other than developing agriculture and trade, another key reason for travelling so far was seeking gold, and such expeditions were often financed by private individuals. The first prospecting expeditions and companies were established in and deployed to the Far East in the late 1860s, and the gold mining industry rapidly became a significant part of regional economy. It accounted for up to a third of the gold mined in pre-revolutionary Russia (Alekseev 1982, 253). These developments in Russia as well as the rapid increase of population and launching of federal infrastructure and agricultural programs in the District of Alaska following the Klondike and Nome Gold Rushes showed how looking for precious metals and other resources contributed to travel, settlement, and economic progress in distant unpopulated regions (Nikitin 2005, 759–761).

At the same time, intensive gold mining and its consequences disturbed the life of the native population, which came into contact with the incoming Russians and Americans. The positive impact of new commodities, technologies, and modern methods in agriculture and craft was partly undone by diseases, disruption of the local environment, and the forced relocation of native populations (Forsyth 1992, 217–218; Haycox 2020, 221–223).

Besides economic, scientific interest also contributed to the exploration of these territories, with multiple expeditions studying flora, fauna as well as indigenous peoples. Examples include the 1895–1898 expedition to the coast of the Okhotsk Sea and the Kamchatka Peninsula led by Russian engineer and geologist Karol Bohdanowicz, Sergei Kichenski and Nikolay Slyunin as well as the Jesup North Pacific Expedition (1897–1902), financed by director of the American Museum of Natural History Morris K. Jesup. The latter was carried out in collaboration of Russian (Waldemar Bogoras and Waldemar Jochelson) and American (Franz Boas) anthropologists, and investigated the culture, folklore, and relationships between indigenous peoples on both sides of the Bering Strait (Fitzhugh and Crowell 1988, 103). In a way, expeditions, whether scientific or gold-seeking, and their results, including travelogues, were among the major sources of information about the region and indigenous lifestyle. And the fact that they were published in considerable numbers indicates interest in the topic among readers and publishers.

Authors and Expeditions

Out of a total corpus of at least 10 travelogues, this study focuses on two, one from each country. One of them was written, in Russian, by Ivan Akifiev (1872–1905), a member of the joint Russian-American expedition to the shores of the Chukchi Peninsula in the summer of 1900. Born in Nizhny Novgorod, Akifiev graduated from the medical faculty of Moscow University and acquired doctoral practice while supervising builders of the Samara-Zlatoust Railroad. He travelled extensively, visiting Switzerland, Italy, and in 1898 Korea as part of the Russian expedition aimed at studying possibilities of gaining concessions as well as identifying sea and land routes of Korea for military purposes. Later Akifiev was a frontline doctor during the Russo-Japanese War. Overall, his activities made him involved with Russian Far Eastern economic and political prospects, and the expedition to the Chukchi Peninsula, in which he also played the role of the doctor, seems to confirm this fact. The other travelogue depicts the explorations of Washington B. Vanderlip (1863–1949), an American engineer from Elkhart, Indiana, who had previously worked in Australia, Burma, and Korea. Between 1898 and 1900 he conducted

several expeditions across the Chukchi Peninsula and into the Kamchatka region. Expeditions undertaken by both authors were inspired by the Klondike Gold Rush, following up on the assumption that considerable gold could be found on the Russian side of the Bering Strait, too.

At this point, some initial remarks are in order. Firstly, neither author knew the other language: Vanderlip did not speak Russian, and Akifiev had no English. Nor did they speak any of the native ones, which, in turn, seriously limited their experience. Also, both texts went through some revision: Akifiev's travelogue was subjected to Russian censorship, while Vanderlip's travel account was put into a book form by Homer B. Hulbert, American journalist in Korea. This might have had an impact on the travelogues' structure and, in part, their authenticity.

Both travelogues follow a chronological order, but they differ in narration and structure. Akifiev's notes are written in the form of a diary and are presented in retrospect. He begins with leaving St. Petersburg westward to New York through Washington and Chicago to San Francisco, from where the expedition, led again by Karol Bohdanowicz and including Russian, American, English, and Chinese prospectors, left the city in June 1900. They sailed towards the Chukchi Peninsula on the *Samoa*, a steamer operated by an American crew. The expedition was organized by Colonel Vladimir Vonliarliarskii, who in January 1900 petitioned the Russian Ministry of Agriculture and State Domains for the authorization to concentrate all mining development of the peninsula in his hands, and promptly received a 5-year concession in April. The expedition was financed from London by Friedrich Becker, who shortly before the expedition created the company named East Siberian Syndicate. The expedition travelled to the northeast of the peninsula, visiting Unalaska (Aleutian Islands), Providence Bay, Cape Chaplin, the Senyavin Strait, Saint Lawrence Bay, circled the peninsula through the Bering Strait up to Kolyuchin Bay, and visited Nome, Alaska, twice. The crew of the *Samoa* was complemented by 12 Russian workers and 8 Cossacks and marines from the Russian warship *Yakut*. On the way back Akifiev briefly visited Petropavlovsk (present-day Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky), Sakhalin, and Vladivostok before going to Japan.

Vanderlip's travelogue is divided into chapters, the content of which is ranging from describing people and events along the way to specifically examining local nature, native customs, and traditions. He starts from Vladivostok through Sakhalin to the city of Ghijiga (known as the ghost town Ghijiginsk today, formed in 1752) located at the Ghijigin Bay of the Okhotsk Sea. It was from here that he organized most of his expeditions in 1898–1899, reaching inland into the Chukchi and Kamchatka Peninsulas and the areas around the Kolyma Mountains, which he wrongly identified as the Stanovoi mountain range. In the summer of 1900 he

also visited the coast of the Chukchi Peninsula on the steamer *Progress*, incidentally crossing paths with the *Samoa* along the way. While he briefly mentioned being hired by “a Russian firm” to do the exploration, he was apparently employed by the company of Russian merchant and industrialist Julius Briner. Briner was stationed in Vladivostok, and his company was involved with German and British investors also looking for resources on Sakhalin and in Northeast Siberia.

Both travelers failed to realize their respective goal in full: Vanderlip did not find anything of value, while Bohdanowicz’s expedition was cancelled after conflicts erupted between Russian and American crew members. The breaking point came when American crew members persuaded the captain of the *Samoa* to go back to Nome in the beginning of August. In the city the Russians were held on board, by force, for several days, followed by legal proceedings, before they were allowed to leave for home after being acquitted by a local court in early September.

Travel Conditions and Landscapes

Both travelogues pay serious attention to the means and conditions of travel. Akifiev states that the decision on his and his Russian companions’ part to travel westward was based on the lack of infrastructure development in the Russian Far East: they saved almost a month of travel by going from St. Petersburg to San Francisco westward rather than eastward through Vladivostok (1904, 1). Thus, the company took a series of trains to London, then the steamer *Campania* of the Cunard Steamship Company to New York, and continued to San Francisco by train. While he does not describe travel conditions on the way to California extensively, he makes critical remarks on almost all occasions. On the way to London, while conceding that German-made cars are superior to Russian ones, he calls the food mediocre and expensive; for him, the *Campania* looks like a “giant house” afloat, the interior is wonderful, but the cabins are small, and the price of the first class is too expensive. And while he enjoyed the comfort of the Pullman cars on his way to San Francisco, Akifiev mocks the quality of the American railroads (1904 5, 8, 18). On seeing the *Samoa* for the first time, he again voices disillusionment:

The disenchantment was complete. I did not believe it when Stern said to us: “And here is our steamer!”. It seemed so small and unimpressive to us. His length is only 150 feet, passenger cabins are only on aft and deck, making a rather strange appearance. ... It looks as if the middle of the steamer is broken down. The dirt everywhere is terrible. (Akifiev 1904, 19; all translations are mine)

Vanderlip, on the other hand, barely described how he got to Ghijiga on a steamer, but he paid much attention to listing all the necessary items and commodities he was bringing with him, ranging from guns and tobacco for trade to needles and pipe-bowls (Vanderlip 1903, 14–18). His travelogue depicts the local ways of travel in the area of his exploration, including horses, deer, and sled dogs. He writes in detail about the process of riding a deer and operating a *narta* (sledge) with sled dogs, praising deer and particularly dogs for their suitability for travelling in harsh travel conditions as well as for their natural instincts, including dogs' ability to "foresee" the upcoming blizzard. Once the dogs saved Vanderlip and his companions from starvation by bringing eggs of seagulls. He also adds stories of adventure and excitement, for instance, when his sled dogs started chasing deer instinctively, leading to his sledge abruptly capsizing:

I have coursed antelope in Texas, and in Arizona have picked wild turkeys from the ground while on horseback, but for good exhilarating sport give me fourteen wild sledge-dogs, the open tundra, and a bunch of deer ahead. (Vanderlip 1903, 187–188)

The nature of the scarcely populated territories is also depicted in both travelogues. Akifiev omits his impressions about American landscapes, writing only about what he sees after the *Samoa* leaves San Francisco. He bids goodbye to California, "the land of gold, light, and warmth" and addresses "the Severe North" as a guest coming to an undiscovered place (Akifiev 1904, 28). When the *Samoa* reaches Providence Bay, the crew first catches sight of the Chukchi Peninsula. In his words:

The closer we were approaching the coast, the clearer were the black arrays of colossal bare mountains, covered with white patches of snow. These somber, stern mountains, fog, grey sea covered with floating ice, penetrating dampness and cold gives one a unique, overwhelming impression. It seems like we entered in a new, dreamlike world. (Akifiev 1904, 44)

But this "overwhelming impression" quickly gave way to the notion of "harsh and unwelcoming" nature when the expedition landed on the coast of the peninsula for the first time – when the birdcalls and sounds of cracking ice were the only things which "made this dead nature alive" (Akifiev 1904, 49). The image of "dead nature" dominates throughout Akifiev's travelogue, except for the odd clear days in late summer, when bright weather finally gives the feeling of nature "awakened after its ten-month sleep and cheerfully smiling" at the sun, which "has woken her up with hot kisses" (Akifiev 1904, 100). His preference clearly lies with the landscape of

Petropavlovsk when returning to Russia after the end of the expedition: it is shown to be clearly superior in contrast to dead and cold Chukchi Peninsula.

Vanderlip, in contrast, writes little about his impressions when seeing landscapes, but extensively describes local fauna, most often in connection with hunting prospects. When going up the Ghijiga river to reach Ghijiga for the first time he describes it extensively: how the coast is filled with dead salmon swept ashore as well as seagulls hunting them, noting the variety of berries and birds, concluding:

An hour's stroll is enough to use up all the gun-shells one can conveniently carry, and to bag more game than one can bring home. The hunter has only to sit down in a "goose lane" or behind a blind of some sort and shoot birds right and left. ... The natives, as a rule, are too poor to own shot-guns, and so do not profit largely by this generous supply of feathered game. (Vanderlip 1903, 63)

Episodes of hunting, whether for food, profit, or fun as well as consuming natural products, such as seal fat or deer meat, often occur in his travelogue, giving the notion of the land as a source of survival as well as prosperity for potential hunters. Besides, his travelogue contains many situations when the author prospected and lived in the wilderness or when his life was in danger, such as an encounter with a bear or being caught in a winter blizzard in an open space for several days (Vanderlip 1903, 97–98, 169–170). At times, the author got involved in more dangerous undertakings. On one of his expeditions, Vanderlip and his companions had to go down a river. Instead of going along the riverside, the author decided to make a raft and go down-stream, stating his reasoning:

The rush and swirl of the angry waters, the narrow escape from the ragged crest of a reef that came almost, but not quite, to the surface, and was invisible thirty feet away, the rush past steep cliffs and flowery banks, all formed such a delightful contrast to the weary plodding through the forest that we were willing to welcome almost any dangers for the sake of the exhilaration of this mad dash down the stream. (Vanderlip 1903, 291–292)

These scenes of interactions with the wilderness show that at times the author wanted to present himself as a brave and skilled polar explorer and impress his readers.

Images of Natives and Their Life

Another major topic of both travelogues is the life and living conditions of indigenous peoples, primarily Chukchi, Koryak, Even, and Evenki (the latter two were known together as Tungus before the 1930s). Although they led a self-sustaining nomadic or sedentary life based on hunting, fishing, whaling, and reindeer herding, they had unique beliefs as well as accommodation and clothing adapted to severe climate. Still, information about them to the Western readership was produced primarily by explorers coming from outside of the region (Leane 2019, 361).

While the overall population of the Primorskaya Oblast (which back then included both the Kamchatka and Chukchi Peninsulas as well as the Russian Pacific coast all the way to Vladivostok) according to the 1897 census was around 223 thousand people, indigenous peoples made up the majority in the northeast of the area (Anadyr and Ghijiga districts), including 11,751 Chukchi, around 7,300 Koryaks and around 8,850 Tungus (approximately 740 Evens, also known as Lamuts, and 8,110 Evenks) – out of an overall number of around 65,000 Tungus living in Siberia and the Far East combined (DSIRGO 1912, 1–12, 710–712, 864–868).

While the Russian government considered all the territories of the Far East its own, weakness of Russian administration in the faraway regions and lack of infrastructure led to increased American trade presence in the area, especially in present-day Primorsky Krai and the regions close to Alaska, notably the Chukchi Peninsula (Garusova 2001, 56). In these areas Americans were increasingly engaging in both legal and illegal hunting, fishing, and whaling in Russian waters. They also actively traded with the native population, giving their manufactured goods, guns, clothes, and other commodities in exchange for meat and pelts. This barter trade was also ambiguous, often helping the locals to survive and obtain necessary items, but at the same time traders were gaining significant profits and securing overwhelming presence that concerned the Russian government and business elite, both fearing the “Americanization” of the natives by adopting the English language and American culture. Another major problem was illegal alcohol selling to the natives, which clearly had an ill influence on their physical and mental health (Garusova 2001, 44–48). Thus, the natives mentioned above came under both Russian and American influence. This was true especially for Chukchi, who, remaining the only indigenous people not bound by *yasak* (fur tribute collected from indigenous peoples of Siberia) to the Russian authorities, traded and picked goods from both Russians and Americans, acting as a “middle ground” between the two, while not being completely dependent on either (Znamenski 1999, 24–26).

The Bohdanowicz expedition visited native villages only along the coast of the Chukchi Peninsula. Therefore, Akifiev writes only about the Chukchi, although he possibly saw Eskimo and Yupik peoples, who then also lived in the area. His first encounter with the Chukchi was on the coast of Providence Bay, with some natives boarding the *Samoa*. Having already seen a Chukchi burial ground where, he claims, the dead bodies were kept in the open, he describes the clothes and accommodation of these people. Their clothes are sturdy but not hygienic, their faces reveal major diseases, and their *yarangas* (Chukchi tents) are anything but clean. He does not write about Chukchi culture or beliefs at all. His conclusion is derogatory:

To eat seal meat, fat, dead whales thrown out of the sea, to sleep in stinking hides in the dirt of the smoking tent. What kind of life is this? But they still live, joke, and laugh. What can austerity lead to! (Akifiev 1904, 58)

Later, visiting the village of Ungazik (Indian Point), Akifiev claims that those Chukchi who are often visited by Americans are looking better, some even live in log cabins made by American merchants. Still, while acknowledging the beneficial American influence, he tends to view the region and indigenous peoples from a political point of view, arguing multiple times that the Russian government and businessmen, unlike Americans, completely forgot about the region and its needs. In case of finding gold his expedition could incite further Russian migration to the region, giving Chukchi an example of “a more cultured way of life”. He then speaks decisively for the need of the government to step in:

It is strange that the Russians don't visit the Chukchi Peninsula, even for commerce, even though Americans see coming here for barter trade and profit from it. Our government would do well to consider sending navy ships here at least to oppose the exploitative trade of foreigners. (Akifiev 1904, 102–103)

At the same time, he is satisfied with the remaining Russian and Orthodox influence among natives on the Aleutian Islands and he regrets the sale of Alaska to the United States in 1867 (Akifiev mistakenly dates it to 1866), complaining that Alaska's newly found resources, including gold, proved that it was worth way more than its original price (1904, 90). Overall, Akifiev does not seem interested in the indigenous population, preferring to see the region as a battleground of influence between two modernizing empires and expressing imperialistic views in terms of establishing control over the land and population for their own good (Said 1994, 78).

Vanderlip, in contrast to Akifiev, experienced interactions and living side by side with multiple peoples – Chukchi, Koryak, and Tungus – as well as in villages of mixed Russian and native populations. He had various kinds of interactions with the natives, from trading to eating and even sleeping in their tents. He often used what Carl Thompson calls the “principle of attachment”, referring American readership either to American understanding of races, the Wild West or the Orient (2011, 68). For instance, he describes seeing the Koryak for the first time as follows:

These people were pure Koraks, a little under the medium size, in which they resemble the Japanese. I was led into the largest of the tents, and a wooden bowl containing boiled reindeer meat was placed before me. To the delight of my host, I went to my pack and produced some tea. I also displayed some sugar and black bread, which firmly established me in their good graces (Vanderlip 1903, 95).

Another example is when he refers to the Chukchi as “Apaches of Siberia” for resisting Russian advance for decades. Vanderlip also contrasts his experience with the Chukchi to the hardships of Harry de Windt (1856–1933), a prominent British traveler, who had previously traveled in the region and published his impressions in *Through the Gold-Fields of Alaska to Bering Straits* (1898), a travelogue, which Vanderlip had read before preparing for his own journeys. De Windt wanted to reach Paris from New York by land in 1896, but he and his companion had to stay at the Chukchi village of Oumwaidjik (Cape Chaplin) for 1,5 months until an American steamer spotted and rescued them. He describes living among what he calls “the filthiest people in creation” while suffering from their drunkenness and deception, cold, vermin, and later skin eruption and mental stress (De Windt 1898, 201, 268–270). Contrary to De Windt, Vanderlip defines these natives as “the finest race of savages that it has ever been my lot to meet” (Vanderlip 1903, 229).

He describes Koryaks most thoroughly, including their hunting skills, beliefs, marriage, and family life as well as their shamanistic beliefs. On the one hand, he seemed to have marked interest towards native life and underlined their talent in building and making unique tents, clothes or pole weapons as well as highlighting their positive traits such as kindness, hospitality, and, in case of Tungus, religious faith. The latter is demonstrated by describing the event when all the members of the converted Tungus family crossed themselves before an Orthodox icon in a tent as “a scene that would have put to shame not a few of the homes in America” (Vanderlip 1903, 108). But, at the same time, he also describes some of them being dirty, their tents cramped, and overall tends to present his interactions with the natives within the dichotomy of savage and civilization. When being caught in

a blizzard, Vanderlip tried to tell his native companions about elections, railways, and electricity, but he was deemed crazy. In another interaction, when a Tungus native cleaned a cup from his own stock with moss and gave it to him, inviting Vanderlip to drink tea in his tent, he writes:

Strange is the effect of environment; a year previous, no inducement could have made me use those cups after seeing them cleansed in that fashion. Was I, after all, a savage, and civilization but a thin veneer? I found myself at times looking at life from the standpoint of these people. I was thinking, dreaming, and talking in my sleep in my polyglot language. At times I would talk to myself in English, just to enjoy the sound of it. ... Action was my only salvation. Had I been compelled to stay in one place I should have feared for my reason. (Vanderlip 1903, 197)

Like Akifiev, Vanderlip was also prone to generalizations in his descriptions of native life. When briefly mentioning the Russian ban on selling alcohol to the natives, he notes how natives are keen on spirits and how they could sell even their own wives and daughters for another drink (1903, 10). Apart from that, he describes his native companions as if they were destined to be loyal to him throughout his journey, depicting the “noble savage” archetype:

This Tunguse, Fronyo, was game to the backbone. When it came time to start out once more on our crazy craft, he crossed himself devoutly, and followed me without a murmur. He said that if God willed that he should die on that raft he would die, that was all. If he did not follow me wherever I went he felt that he would lose caste with his people and be shamed forever. (Vanderlip 1903, 278)

What both Akifiev and Vanderlip agreed on is the process of trade with the natives, the fact that they do not recognize money and mostly do a barter exchange of pelts or animals for the articles they need at the moment, and that traders can make a huge profit over it. Vanderlip dedicates several pages describing the price of fur in dollars, Russian government policies regarding fur tribute and how sables, being the most expensive type of pelt, are hunted by the locals. His description adds to Vanderlip’s understanding of the valuable flora of the region and could also be appealing to American hunters and traders who wished to do business with the native population.

Russian-American “Othering”

The final major topic in our analysis of the two travelogues is the representation of the Russians and Americans as the “other”. Akifiev’s thoughts were most likely influenced by the arrest that the Russian party of the expedition experienced at Nome. The arrest was based, according to his travelogue, on the alleged fear of the Americans that the Russians, being the majority among the prospectors and later having armed Cossacks on deck, might leave them on the Chukchi Peninsula or even capture the *Samoa* by force, throwing anyone resisting overboard. He openly condemns American actions, mocking how Russians were limited in their freedom while being arrested on a steamer in the “land of freedom”. Ten days later the Russians were allowed to leave for Russian waters on the *Samoa* escorted by an American warship to wait there for the arrival of the *Yakut* to pick them up.

Before getting to San Francisco, he briefly covered his trip throughout the United States, describing New York as a very noisy city with dirty streets and unwelcoming skyscrapers, compared to Washington, which he defined, due to its vegetation, wide streets, and lack of overcrowding, as one of the best cities that he had ever visited. Yet, at the same time, when comparing American culture with Russian and European, through the lens of which he at times looks at America, he clearly negates (according to David Spurr) the “high” culture for Americans (1993, 92). Akifiev visited Washington’s National Mall and museums, including the Smithsonian Institute, the Corcoran Gallery of Art, and the National Museum of Natural History, concluding that while their buildings are exquisite, they lack exhibits of real cultural or scientific value, compared to European museums. He also visited New York and Washington’s crowded vaudevilles, describing their repertoire and mocking the American public’s cultural preferences from the position of superiority:

In almost all vaudevilles someone is thrown out of the window... Both big and small are thrown, and this causes frightening laughter on the part of spectators who applaud and scream like crazy. But they like it even more when a girl or a boy around 7 years old enters the scene and starts to dance the can-can while signing something of definite improper content. The audience became completely delighted when seeing the dancing mulatto family. The husband does the can-can immodestly with his wife, and their kids imitate them. “Wonderful” parenting! (Akifiev 1904, 16–17)

His American prospecting counterparts, while some of them looked likable at first, throughout the expedition turned out to be lazier than Russian workers, bringing drinks and guns with them to the shore, hunting and feasting before

doing actual prospecting (Akifiev 1904, 113). Another way that they are vilified is by showing their eagerness for quick profit and when doing unequal trade with the natives or selling them alcohol (even though Akifiev was trading with them as well). Only the maintenance crew of the *Samoa*, consisting of Americans, was praised by him for their honest and responsible work throughout the expedition, mentioning how during the last day before final good-byes in Plover Bay Americans and Russians in amicable spirit got drunk together, with Russians getting in a fight with one another (Akifiev 1904, 142).

He gives a less one-sided image of the country by writing about his conversations with the Russian immigrant family in San Francisco and with Vasili, one of the Russian workers on the *Samoa* who also worked for some time in the city before getting hired for the expedition. While the first, having established a well-to-do life, concludes that, in case of knowing the language, having the desire to work hard as well as proper connections, one could settle down successfully, Vasili gives a derogatory conclusion, stating that in America “people don’t believe in anything and pray to the devil” (Akifiev 1904, 41). Lack of true religion among Americans and in their missionary activity abroad, which is substituted by charity or agitation, is also among the things Akifiev mentions.

Akifiev got to visit Nome, and while praising the way Americans could quickly build a town and all the necessary infrastructure (the “American way”), the city itself is crowded with money-makers and criminals. When leaving Nome for the Russian waters after the arrest, he gives his final sentence on his experience in America:

Here we are back in Russia, even though there is nothing similar there to the European part of Russia. It is desolate around, but this dead silence, these bare mountains are still somehow dearer than the noises of Nome, noises of the mobs of vagabonds, crooks, con men, and quick profit seekers. (Akifiev 1904, 134–135)

Overall, he seems to have had negative prejudices about the country, which he not only confirmed, but reinforced, based on the sense of superiority of Russian/European over American.

Vanderlip, in contrast to Akifiev, dedicates less written space to the Russian people and their life. On the way to Ghijiga he hired a Russian companion Alexander Yankovski, writing about how he disregarded calling him in a Russian way by name and patronymic (synonymous to middle) name:

As this name was quite too complicated for everyday use, I had my choice of paring it down to “Alek,” “Mike,” or “Yank,” and while my loyalty to

Uncle Sam would naturally prompt me to use the last of these I forbore and Alek he became. He did not take kindly to it at first, for it is *de rigueur* to address a Russian by both his first and second names, the latter being his father's name with *vitch* attached. This was out of the question, however, and he succumbed to the inevitable. (Vanderlip 1903, 13)

However, while noting his bravery when "Alek" accompanied him on his first expeditions inland, Vanderlip completely stopped mentioning him later in the travelogue.

Among the few things he wrote about was his visit to Korsakovsk Post (present-day Korsakov) on Sakhalin as well as his Christmas celebrations in Ghijiga. Russians are depicted as being religious, hospitable, and creative, having rich food and good-quality houses. He described his feeling of being "embarrassed by their excessive generosity" when the Russian population of Ghijiga, after having realised that Vanderlip is celebrating Christmas (earlier than among Orthodox Christians), decided to join and organize special festivities (Vanderlip 1903, 179). Yet from time to time, he still distinguished between himself and the Russians in a rather derogatory way, especially when commenting on Russian bathing habits and excessive drinking. He seems to refer Russians to the Orient when eating in their company, "othering" through the lens of Europe (just like Akifiev did) when noticing how all the food gets served at once and nothing gets passed around the table except vodka. Concluding on the rich dinner that he had in the company of a high official in Korsakovsk Post on Sakhalin, he adds:

My use of the fork was not the only thing that distinguished me while in the country of the White Czar. Wherever I went, the Russians were highly amused at my use of the tooth-brush, which they consider a peculiarly feminine utensil. (Vanderlip 1903, 33–34)

To sum up, Vanderlip also looks at Russian life in a mixed way, and for both travelers it seemed hard to understand the other culture, which is hardly surprising given their lack of language skills to communicate.

There is a subject of Russian life that both travellers write about – the Russian exile camps on Sakhalin, which they both visited. They both describe the types of prisons, condition of prison barracks, interactions with prisoners or city dwellers who used to be criminals. And both authors condemn what they saw openly, and while Vanderlip writes of the exile system as "terrestrial Valhalla ... a sort of ante-mortem purgatory", Akifiev, after leaving the island, states in disgust:

Away, away as quickly as possible from this horrible island, where thousands of people are physically and morally decaying alive. (Akifiev 1904, 141)

Conclusion

While there were multiple expeditions to the region on behalf of both countries, the travelogues analyzed in this paper were of particular interest among the corpus since other materials included either official reports or strictly scientific publications, whereas Akifiev and Vanderlip were not subjected to reporting to authorities or to scientific community requirements. Thus, they were able to express their views regarding a variety of subjects for the general audience at home, exerting considerable influence on the Russian-American perceptions of one another. Although both expeditions failed to realize their respective goals, these two travelogues tend to demonstrate the mutual interest that existed both in Russia and in the United States concerning the possibilities of development and the future of the Russian Far East at the turn of the twentieth century. By publishing these books, both authors earned considerable fame and respect and established themselves as experienced polar travellers. It seems that, overall, both authors wrote the narratives of their travels as representatives of their own cultures addressed to their home audience sharing the same culture and vision of the world. While Vanderlip was somewhat more interested in Russia and in the life of natives on its territory, Akifiev did not really change his initial – rather condescending – preconceptions towards America and Americans as well as natives living in his own country. And since travelogues can indirectly show the views of the public, it is possible that while Americans were open to increasing their presence in the Russian Far East, the Russians were becoming more aware and even more suspicious of their actions. On the larger scale, travels to the least explored territories of both modernizing countries formed a cultural interaction point between them at the turn of the twentieth century and brought additional nuances and more complexity to the process of the development of the images about one another.

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