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A NOTE ON *R*-EQUITABLE *K*-COLORINGS OF TREES

Alain HERTZ

Ecole Polytechnique de Montréal and GERAD Montréal, Canada alain.hertz@gerad.ca

Bernard RIES

PSL, Université Paris-Dauphine 75775 Paris Cedex 16, France CNRS, LAMSADE UMR 7243 bernard.ries@dauphine.fr

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Abstract: A graph G = (V, E) is *r*-equitably *k*-colorable if there exists a partition of *V* into *k* independent sets V_1, V_2, \dots, V_k such that $||V_i| - |V_j|| \le r$ for all $i, j \in \{1, 2, \dots, k\}$. In this note, we show that if two trees T_1 and T_2 of order at least two are *r*-equitably *k*-colorable for $r \ge 1$ and $k \ge 3$, then all trees obtained by adding an arbitrary edge between T_1 and T_2 are also *r*-equitably *k*-colorable.

Keywords: Trees, equitable coloring, independent sets.

MSC: 05C15, 05C69.

1 INTRODUCTION

All graphs in this paper are finite, simple and loopless. Let G = (V, E) be a graph. We denote by |G| its order, i.e, the number of vertices in G. For a vertex $v \in V$, let N(v) denote the set of vertices in G that are adjacent to v. N(v) is called the *neighborhood* of v and its elements are *neighbors* of v. The *degree* of vertex v, denoted by deg(v), is the number of neighbors of v, i.e., deg(v) = |N(v)|. $\Delta(G)$ denotes the *maximum degree* of G, i.e., $\Delta(G) = \max\{deg(v) | v \in V\}$. For a set $V' \subseteq V$, we denote by G - V' the graph obtained from G by deleting all vertices in V' as well as all edges incident to at least one vertex of V'.

An independent set in a graph G = (V, E) is a set $S \subseteq V$ of pairwise nonadjacent vertices. The maximum size of an independent set in a graph G = (V, E) is called the *independence number* of G and denoted by $\alpha(G)$.

A k-coloring c of a graph G = (V, E) is a partition of V into k independent sets which we will denote by $V_1(c), V_2(c), \dots, V_k(c)$ and refer to as color classes. 294

The cardinality of a largest color class with respect to a coloring c will be denoted by Max_c . A graph G is r-equitably k-colorable, with $r \ge 1$ and $k \ge 2$, if there exists a k-coloring c of G such that $||V_i(c)| - |V_j(c)|| \le r$ for all $i, j \in \{1, 2, \dots, k\}$. Such a coloring is called an r-equitable k-coloring of G. A graph which is 1-equitably k-colorable is simply said to be equitably k-colorable.

The notion of equitable colorability was introduced in [8] and has been studied since then by many authors (see [2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9]). In [3], the authors gave a complete characterization of trees which are equitably k-colorable. This result was then generalized to forests in [2]. More precisely, for a forest F = (V, E), let $\alpha^*(F) = \min\{\alpha(F - N[v]) | v \in V \text{ and } deg(v) = \Delta(F)\}$

Theorem 1.1 ([2]) Suppose F = (V, E) is a forest and $k \ge 3$ is an integer. Then F is equitably k-colorable if and only if $k \ge \lceil \frac{|F|+1}{\alpha^*(F)+2} \rceil$.

This result can easily be generalized to r-equitable k-colorings.

Theorem 1.2 ([1]) Suppose F = (V, E) is a forest and $r \ge 1, k \ge 3$ are two integers. Then F is r-equitably k-colorable if and only if $k \ge \lceil \frac{|F|+r}{\alpha^*(F)+r+1} \rceil$.

Proof: Suppose F is r-equitably k-colorable for $r \ge 1$ and $k \ge 3$. Let v be a vertex in F such that $deg(v) = \Delta(F)$ and $\alpha(F - N[v]) = \alpha^*(F)$. Clearly, for such a coloring, there are at most $\alpha^*(F) + 1$ vertices in the color class that contains v. It follows that all other color classes contain at most $\alpha^*(F) + r + 1$ vertices. Thus $|F| \le \alpha^*(F) + 1 + (k-1)(\alpha^*(F) + r + 1) = k(\alpha^*(F) + r + 1) - r$, and we therefore have $k \ge \lceil \frac{|F|+r}{\alpha^*(F)+r+1} \rceil$.

Conversely, let $k \ge \lceil \frac{|F|+r}{\alpha^*(F)+r+1} \rceil$. Consider the forest F' = (V', E') obtained from F by adding r-1 new isolated vertices. Then |F'| = |F|+r-1 and $\alpha^*(F') = \alpha^*(F)+r-1$. Thus $k \ge \lceil \frac{|F|+r}{\alpha^*(F)+r+1} \rceil = \lceil \frac{|F'|+1}{\alpha^*(F')+2} \rceil$. By Theorem 1.1, F' is equitably k-colorable. Restricting the color classes to V gives an r-equitable k-coloring of F.

In this note, we are interested in a different sufficient condition for a tree to be r-equitably k-colorable. More precisely, given a tree T = (V, E) and an edge $e \in E$ such that its removal from T creates two trees T_1 and T_2 of order at least two, we show that if both T_1 and T_2 are r-equitably k-colorable, for $r \ge 1$ and $k \ge 3$, then T is also r-equitably k-colorable. We also explain why $|T_1|, |T_2| \ge 2$ and $k \ge 3$ are necessary conditions.

2 A SUFFICIENT CONDITION

Consider a tree T and two integers $r \ge 1$ and $k \ge 3$. Let c be an arbitrary r-equitable k-coloring of the vertex set of T such that $|V_1(c)| \ge |V_2(c)| \ge \cdots \ge |V_k(c)|$. Then there may be vertices in T which are forced to be colored with color k. Indeed, if for instance T is a star on (k-1)r + k vertices, then the vertex v of degree > 1 necessarily belongs to $V_k(c)$ and actually $V_k(c) = \{v\}$. Furthermore, we have $|V_i(c)| = r + 1$ for $i \in \{1, 2, \cdots, k - 1\}$. It turns out that this is no longer true for colors $1, 2, \cdots, k - 1$, as shown in the following property.

Lemma 2.1 Consider an r-equitably k-colorable tree T of order at least two, where $r \ge 1$ and $k \ge 3$. Also, let ℓ be any element in $\{1, 2, \dots, k-1\}$. Then, for any vertex u in T, there exists an r-equitable k-coloring c of T with $|V_i(c)| \ge |V_j(c)|$ for all $1 \le i < j \le k$ such that $u \notin V_\ell(c)$.

Proof: Suppose the lemma is false. We then clearly have $|T| \ge 3$. Let c be an r-equitable k-coloring of T with $|V_i(c)| \ge |V_j(c)|$ for all $1 \le i < j \le k$. Among all such colorings we choose one such that, for each $t = 1, 2, \dots, k$, there is no r-equitable k-coloring c' of T with $|V_i(c)| = |V_i(c')|$ for $i = 1, 2, \dots, t - 1$ and $\max_{i=t}^k \{|V_i(c')|\} < |V_t(c)|$. In other words, $Max_c = |V_1(c)|$ is minimum among all r-equitable k-colorings of T, $|V_2(c)|$ is minimum among all r-equitable k-colorings of T, and so on.

Let $\ell \in \{1, 2, \dots, k-1\}$ be an integer for which the lemma does not hold. We define x = 1, y = 2, z = 3 if $\ell = 1$, and $x = \ell - 1, y = \ell, z = \ell + 1$ if $\ell > 1$. Since we assume that the lemma is false, it follows that $u \in V_{\ell}(c)$, which means that $u \in V_x(c)$ if $\ell = 1$ and $u \in V_y(c)$ if $\ell > 1$. Then $|V_x(c)| > |V_y(c)|$, otherwise we could assign color x to all vertices in $V_y(c)$ and color y to all vertices in $V_x(c)$ to obtain an r-equitable k-coloring c' with $u \notin V_{\ell}(c')$, a contradiction. Similarly, we must have $|V_y(c)| > |V_z(c)|$ when $\ell > 1$ since otherwise we could assign color y to all vertices in $V_z(c)$ and color z to all vertices in $V_y(c)$, and thus the lemma would hold.

We define F as the subgraph of T induced by $V_x(c) \cup V_y(c) \cup V_z(c)$. If F is disconnected, we add some edges to make F become a tree T' such that no two adjacent vertices have the same color with respect to c; otherwise we set T' = F. Let V' denote the vertex set of T'. Moreover, for q = y or z, we denote $\overline{q} = y + z - q$. This implies that $\overline{q} = z$ if q = y and $\overline{q} = y$ if q = z. We start by proving the following two claims.

Claim 1: There exists no r-equitable 3-coloring c' of T' (using colors x, y, z) with c'(u) = c(u), $|V_x(c')| = |V_x(c)| - 1$, $|V_q(c')| = |V_q(c)| + 1$ and $|V_{\overline{q}}(c')| = |V_{\overline{q}}(c)|$ for q = y or z.

Indeed, if such a coloring c' exists, then the assumption on c implies $|V_q(c')| = |V_x(c)| > |V_x(c')|$. Now we can obtain an r-equitable k-coloring c^* of T by letting $V_x(c^*) = V_q(c')$, $V_q(c^*) = V_x(c')$, and $V_i(c^*) = V_i(c')$ if $i \neq x, q$. We distinguish two cases:

- If $\ell = 1$, we have $|V_1(c^*)| > \max_{i=2}^k \{|V_i(c^*)|\}$ and $u \notin V_1(c^*)$.
- If $\ell > 1$, we have q = y since otherwise $|V_z(c')| = |V_z(c)| + 1 = |V_x(c)|$ which contradicts $|V_x(c)| > |V_y(c)| > |V_z(c)|$. Then $|V_1(c^*)| \ge \cdots \ge |V_{\ell-1}(c^*)| > |V_\ell(c^*)| \ge |V_{\ell+1}(c^*)| \ge \cdots \ge |V_k(c^*)|$ and $u \in V_{\ell-1}(c^*)$.

Thus, in both cases, c^* is an *r*-equitable *k*-coloring of *T* such that $|V_i(c^*)| \ge |V_j(c^*)|$ for all $1 \le i < j \le k$ and $u \notin V_{\ell}(c^*)$, a contradiction.

Claim 2: No leaf of T', except possibly u, is in $V_x(c)$.

Indeed, assume T' has a leaf $v \neq u$ in $V_x(c)$ and let w be its unique neighbor in T'. We can change the color of v from x to $\overline{c(w)}$ to obtain an r-equitable 3coloring c' of T' with c'(u) = c(u), $|V_x(c')| = |V_x(c)| - 1$, $|V_{\overline{c(w)}}(c')| = |V_{\overline{c(w)}}(c)| + 1$ and $|V_{c(w)}(c')| = |V_{c(w)}(c)|$, contradicting Claim 1.

Let **vec***T* be the oriented rooted tree obtained from *T'* by orienting the edges from root *u* to the leaves. Let us partition the vertices in $V_x(c)$ into subsets U_1, \dots, U_p such that U_q $(q = 1, 2, \dots, p)$ contains all vertices in $V_x(c)$ having no successor in $V_x(c) - \bigcup_{j=1}^{q-1} U_j$. For a vertex $v \in U_1$, let L(v) denote the set of leaves in **vec***T* having *v* as predecessor.

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If |L(v)| = 1 for some $v \in U_1$, then let $P = v \to s_1 \to \cdots \to s_a$ denote the path from v to the leaf s_a in L(v). If v = u (and hence $\ell = 1$ since $u \in V_x(c)$) then T' is a chain with only one vertex in $V_x(c)$, which means that $V_y(c) = V_z(c) = \emptyset$ since $|V_x(c)| > |V_y(c)| \ge |V_z(c)|$. Thus T' has only one vertex, namely u, and since $u \in V_1(c)$ this implies that T has only one vertex, a contradiction. Hence $v \neq u$. Let w be the predecessor of v in **vec**T:

- if $c(w) = c(s_1)$, we change the color of v to $\overline{c(w)}$ to obtain an r-equitable 3-coloring c' of T' with c'(u) = c(u), $|V_x(c')| = |V_x(c)| - 1$, $|V_{\overline{c(w)}}(c')| = |V_{\overline{c(w)}}(c)| + 1$ and $|V_{c(w)}(c')| = |V_{c(w)}(c)|$, contradicting Claim 1;
- if $c(w) \neq c(s_1)$, we assign color $c(s_1)$ to v, color $c(s_{j+1})$ to s_j (j = 1, 2, ..., a-1), and color x to s_a ; we obtain an r-equitable 3-coloring c' of T' with $|V_i(c')| = |V_i(c)|$ (i = x, y, z), c'(u) = c(u) and a leaf $s_a \in V_x(c')$. But this contradicts Claim 2.

We therefore conclude that $|L(v)| \ge 2$ for all $v \in U_1$. By denoting $W_1 = \bigcup_{v \in U_1} L(v)$, we get $|W_1| \ge 2|U_1|$. For each set U_q , with q > 1, we will now construct a set W_q containing vertices in $V_y(c) \cup V_z(c)$ that are successors of vertices in U_q but not successors of vertices in U_{q-1} . So let v be any vertex in U_q (q > 1). If v has at least 2 immediate successors in **vec**T, we add two of them to W_q . If v has a unique immediate successor in **vec**T, then let $P = v \to s_1 \to \cdots \to s_a \to v'$ denote a path from v to a vertex $v' \in U_{q-1}$. If a > 1, we add s_1 and s_2 to W_q . If a = 1 and s_1 has an immediate successor $w \notin V_x(c)$, then we add s_1 and w to W_q . Assume now that a = 1 and all the immediate successors of s_1 are in $V_x(c)$. We will prove that such a case is not possible.

- If $v \neq u$, then v has a predecessor w in **vec**T. We must have $c(w) = c(s_1)$, otherwise we could assign color $\overline{c(s_1)}$ to v to obtain an r-equitable 3-coloring c' of T' with c'(u) = c(u), $|V_x(c')| = |V_x(c)| 1$, $|V_{\overline{c(s_1)}}(c')| = |V_{\overline{c(s_1)}}(c)| + 1$ and $|V_{c(s_1)}(c')| = |V_{c(s_1)}(c)|$, contradicting Claim 1. But now we can assign color $c(s_1)$ to v and assign color $\overline{c(s_1)}$ to s_1 to obtain an r-equitable 3-coloring c' of T' with c'(u) = c(u), $|V_x(c')| = |V_x(c)| 1$, $|V_{\overline{c(s_1)}}(c')| = |V_{\overline{c(s_1)}}(c)| + 1$ and $|V_{c(s_1)}(c')| = c(u)$, $|V_x(c')| = |V_x(c)| 1$, $|V_{\overline{c(s_1)}}(c')| = |V_{\overline{c(s_1)}}(c)| + 1$ and $|V_{c(s_1)}(c')| = |V_{c(s_1)}(c)|$, contradicting Claim 1.
- If v = u, then $\ell = 1$ since $u \in V_x(c)$. By assigning color $c(s_1)$ to u and color $\overline{c(s_1)}$ to s_1 , we obtain an r-equitable 3-coloring c' of T' with $|V_x(c')| = |V_x(c)| 1$, $|V_{\overline{c(s_1)}}(c')| = |V_{\overline{c(s_1)}}(c)| + 1$ and $|V_{c(s_1)}(c')| = |V_{c(s_1)}(c)|$. It follows from the assumptions on c that $|V_{\overline{c(s_1)}}(c')| = |V_x(c)| > |V_{c(s_1)}(c)| = |V_{c(s_1)}(c')|$. Thus the lemma would hold, a contradiction.

In summary, we have $|W_q| \ge 2|U_q|$. Since all sets W_q are disjoint, we have

$$|V_y(c)| + |V_z(c)| \ge \sum_{q=1}^p |W_q| \ge \sum_{q=1}^p 2|U_q| = 2|V_x(c)|.$$

Hence $|V_y(c)|$ or $|V_z(c)|$ is larger than or equal to $|V_x(c)|$, a contradiction.

Lemma 2.1 allows us to show our main result.

Theorem 2.2 Let T_1 and T_2 be two trees or order at least two. If both T_1 and T_2 are r-equitably k-colorable for $r \ge 1$ and $k \ge 3$, then a tree T obtained by adding an arbitrary edge between T_1 and T_2 is also r-equitably k-colorable.

Proof: Consider an r-equitable k-coloring c of T_1 and an r-equitable k-coloring c' of T_2 such that $|V_i(c)| \ge |V_j(c)|$ and $|V_i(c')| \ge |V_j(c')|$ for all $1 \le i < j \le k$. Let u be a vertex in T_1 and v a vertex in T_2 , and let T be the tree obtained by adding an edge which joins u and v. According to Lemma 2.1, we may assume that $v \notin V_1(c')$. Hence $v \in V_{k-\ell+1}(c')$ for some $\ell \in \{1, 2, \dots, k-1\}$ and it follows from Lemma 2.1 that we may assume that $u \notin V_{\ell}(c)$. We can therefore construct a k-coloring c^* of T such that $V_i(c^*) = V_i(c) \cup V_{k-i+1}(c'), i = 1, 2, \dots, k$. For i > j, we have :

$$|V_i(c^*)| - |V_j(c^*)| = |V_i(c)| + |V_{k-i+1}(c')| - (|V_j(c)| + |V_{k-j+1}(c')|)$$

= (|V_i(c)| - |V_j(c)|) + (|V_{k-i+1}(c')| - |V_{k-j+1}(c')|).

Since $V_j(c) \ge |V_i(c)|$ and $|V_{k-j+1}(c')| \le |V_{k-i+1}(c')|$, we have : • $|V_i(c^*)| - |V_j(c^*)| \ge |V_i(c)| - |V_j(c)| \ge -r$; • $|V_i(c^*)| - |V_j(c^*)| \le |V_{k-i+1}(c')| - |V_{k-j+1}(c')| \le r$.

This proves that the considered k-coloring c^* of T is r-equitable.

Note that the condition $k \ge 3$ in Theorem 2.2 is necessary. Indeed, if both T_1 and T_2 are isomorphic to a star on 3 vertices (with u being the vertex of degree two in T_1 and v a leaf in T_2) then clearly T_1 and T_2 are 1-equitably 2-colorable. But by adding an edge which joins u and v, we obtain a tree T which is not 1-equitably 2-colorable.

Note also that the condition in Theorem 2.2 on the number of vertices in each tree is necessary. Indeed, if T_1 is an r-equitably k-colorable tree for some $k \geq 3$ and $r \geq 1$, and if T_2 contains a single vertex v, then the tree T' obtained by adding an edge which joins v and a vertex u of T_1 is possibly not r-equitably k-colorable. For example, if u is the vertex of degree four in the star T_1 on five vertices, and if we add a neighbor v (the single vertex in T_2) to u, we obtain a star T' on six vertices. While T_1 and T_2 are clearly 1-equitably 3-colorable, T' is not 1-equitably 3-colorable. It is however not difficult to prove that if T is an r-equitably k-colorable tree for some $k \geq 2$ and $r \geq 1$, then the tree T' obtained by adding a new vertex v and making it adjacent to some vertex u of T is (r+1)-equitably k-colorable. Indeed, given an r-equitable k-coloring c of T, we can extend it to a k-coloring c' of T' by assigning any color $j \neq c(u)$ to v with $j \in \{1, 2, \dots, k\}$. If $|V_j(c)| \geq |V_i(c)|$ for all $i \neq j$, then c' is (r+1)-equitable, otherwise c' is r-equitable.

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