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MARIO EUDAVE-MUÑOZ AND JOAN CARLOS SEGURA-AGUILAR

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## ON THE TRANSIENT NUMBER OF A KNOT

MARIO EUDAVE-MUÑOZ AND JOAN CARLOS SEGURA-AGUILAR

**The transient number of a knot  $K$ , denoted  $\text{tr}(K)$ , is the minimal number of simple arcs that have to be attached to  $K$ , in order for  $K$  to be homotoped to a trivial knot in a regular neighborhood of the union of  $K$  and the arcs. We give a lower bound for  $\text{tr}(K)$  in terms of the rank of the first homology group of the double branched cover of  $K$ . In particular, if  $\text{tr}(K) = 1$ , then the first homology group of the double branched cover of  $K$  is cyclic. Using this, we can calculate the transient number of many knots in the tables and show that there are knots with arbitrarily large transient number.**

### 1. Introduction

Let  $K$  be a knot in the 3-sphere and let  $M$  be a submanifold of  $S^3$  containing  $K$ . We say that  $K$  is transient in  $M$  if  $K$  can be homotoped within  $M$  to the trivial knot in  $S^3$ ; otherwise  $K$  is called persistent. For example,  $K$  is persistent in a regular neighborhood  $\mathcal{N}(K)$  of  $K$ , but it is transient in a 3-ball  $B$  containing  $K$ . Yuya Koda and Makoto Ozawa [2] proved that every knot is transient in a submanifold  $M$  if and only if  $M$  is unknotted, that is, its complement in  $S^3$  is a union of handlebodies. Then Koda and Ozawa [2] introduced a new invariant of knots, called the transient number of  $K$ , which somehow measures, starting with  $\mathcal{N}(K)$ , how large must be a submanifold in which  $K$  is transient.

The transient number is defined as follows: given a knot  $K$  in  $S^3$ , there is a collection of arcs  $\{\tau_1, \tau_2, \dots, \tau_n\}$ , disjointly embedded in  $S^3$ , each  $\tau_i$  intersecting  $K$  exactly at its endpoints, such that  $K$  can be homotoped in a regular neighborhood of  $K$  union the arcs,  $T = \mathcal{N}(K \cup \tau_1 \cup \dots \cup \tau_n)$ , into the trivial knot. That is, we perform crossing changes and isotopies inside  $T$ , until we get the trivial knot  $K'$ . Note that any knot  $K'$  obtained from  $K$  in this way is not trivial in  $T$ , i.e., it cannot bound a disk contained in  $T$ , but it can be trivial in  $S^3$ . The transient number of  $K$ ,  $\text{tr}(K)$ , is then defined as the minimal number of arcs needed in such a system of arcs. The transient number is related to other knot invariants, namely  $\text{tr}(K) \leq u(K)$ , where  $u(K)$  is the unknotting number, and  $\text{tr}(K) \leq t(K)$ , where  $t(K)$  is the tunnel number. It is easy to check these inequalities. For the unknotting number, given

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a sequence of crossing changes that unknot  $K$ , consider for each crossing change an arc with endpoints in  $K$  that guides the crossing change, such that a regular neighborhood of the arc encapsulates the crossing change. Then clearly  $K$  can be made trivial in a neighborhood  $T$  of  $K$  union the arcs. For the case of the tunnel number, consider a tunnel system and a neighborhood  $T$  of the union of  $K$  and the arcs, so that the exterior is a handlebody. Isotope  $T$  so that it looks like a standard handlebody in  $S^3$ . Then  $K$  can be projected to the intersection of a plane with  $T$ , and guided by this projection to a plane, crossing changes can be performed to  $K$  inside  $T$  to get the trivial knot.

There is a knot  $K$  such that  $\text{tr}(K) = 1$  whereas  $u(K)$  and  $t(K)$  are larger than one. Some examples with this property are given in [2]. However, in that paper no example is given of a knot  $K$  with  $\text{tr}(K) > 1$ . Homology groups of branched covers have been used to bound invariants like  $u(K)$  and  $t(K)$ , which goes back to the work of Wendt [13]. In fact, it is well known that if  $\Sigma[K]$  denotes the double branched cover of  $K$ , then the rank of the group  $H_1(\Sigma[K])$  gives a lower bound for  $u(K)$ ; see [13] or [4]. It is also not difficult to show that the rank of  $H_1(\Sigma[K])$  is at most  $2t(K) + 1$ ; in particular it is known that if  $t(K) = 1$  then  $H_1(\Sigma[K])$  is a cyclic group (though not explicitly stated, this follows from the computations of homology of cyclic covers done in [1], or from [8]).

We prove that the rank of the first homology group of a cyclic branched cover of a knot gives lower bounds for the transient number. By using the Montesinos trick, it can be shown that if  $K$  is a knot with  $u(K) = n$ , then  $\Sigma[K]$  can be obtained by Dehn surgery on an  $n$ -component link in  $S^3$ , which implies then the bound for  $u(K)$ . We do a kind of generalized Montesinos trick. Our main results are the following.

**Theorem 1.1.** *If  $K$  is a knot in  $S^3$  such that  $\text{tr}(K) = n$ , then the first homology group of the double branched cover of  $K$  has a presentation with at most  $2n + 1$  generators.*

**Theorem 1.2.** *If  $K$  is a knot in  $S^3$  such that  $\text{tr}(K) = n$ , then the first homology group of the  $p$ -fold cyclic branched cover of  $K$  has a presentation with at most  $pn + 1$  generators.*

These results imply that  $\text{rank}(H_1(\Sigma[K])) \leq 2 \text{tr}(K) + 1$ . If  $\Sigma_p[K]$  denotes the  $p$ -fold cyclic branched cover of  $K$ , it follows that  $\text{rank}(H_1(\Sigma_p[K])) \leq p \text{tr}(K) + 1$ .

For the case that  $\text{tr}(K) = 1$ , we can get a better bound. In fact, by doing a careful calculation of the first homology group of  $\Sigma[K]$ , we get the following result.

**Theorem 1.3.** *If  $K$  is a knot in  $S^3$  such that  $\text{tr}(K) = 1$ , then the first homology group of the double branched cover of  $K$  is cyclic.*

Of course, these results may not be sharp. It would be interesting to find sharp bounds for these inequalities. It would also be interesting to find bounds for the transient number depending on other classical invariants of knots.

Given any knot invariant, it is always interesting to study its behavior under connected sums of knots. We have the following:

**Theorem 1.4.** *Let  $K_1, K_2$  be knots in  $S^3$ . Then  $\text{tr}(K_1 \# K_2) \leq \text{tr}(K_1) + \text{tr}(K_2) + 1$ .*

The paper is organized as follows. In Section 2 we sketch a proof that the unknotting number and tunnel number are bounded below by the rank of the first homology group of double branched covers. Then we prove the main results. As part of the proofs, we show also that if  $t(K) = 1$ , then  $H_1(\Sigma[K])$  is cyclic; this claim is used to prove Theorem 1.3. In Section 3 we give examples of knots with large transient number and explore the transient number of knots in the tables of KnotInfo [3]. In Section 4 we consider the transient number of a connected sum of knots, prove some facts and propose some problems.

We work in the piecewise linear category. To avoid cumbersome notation we use expressions like the double branched cover of a knot to mean the double cover of  $S^3$  branched along the knot. If  $\Lambda$  is a simple closed curve in the boundary of a 3-manifold  $M$ , we say adding a 2-handle along  $\Lambda$ , to mean that we attach a 2-handle  $D^2 \times I$  to  $M$ , such that  $\partial D^2 \times I$  is identified with a regular neighborhood of  $\Lambda$  in  $\partial M$ , which is an annulus. Also, if  $M$  and  $T$  are compact 3-manifolds, with  $T \subset M$ , then by  $M \setminus T$  we mean  $M$  minus the interior of  $T$ , or the closure in  $M$  of  $M - T$ . If  $X$  is a topological space,  $|X|$  denotes its number of components.

## 2. Transient number and double branched covers

This section is inspired by an idea that is used to build the double branched cover of a knot with unknotting number equal to one. Consider a knot  $K$  in  $S^3$  with unknotting number equal to one. Let  $\alpha$  be an arc embedded in  $S^3$ , with endpoints in  $K$ , such that a regular neighborhood of it encapsulates the crossing change. So there is a homotopy in  $\mathcal{N}(K \cup \alpha)$  between the knot  $K$  and the trivial knot, which is denoted by  $K'$ . Clearly this homotopy can be taken so that it is constant in  $\mathcal{N}(K) \setminus \mathcal{N}(\alpha)$  and that the changes are occurring only in  $\mathcal{N}(\alpha)$ ; so we assume that  $K'$  is obtained from  $K$  just by taking the two arcs  $K \cap \mathcal{N}(\alpha)$  and passing one arc through the other, which would correspond to a crossing change in the corresponding knot diagram. Due to the above we have that  $K \cap (S^3 \setminus \mathcal{N}(\alpha)) = K' \cap (S^3 \setminus \mathcal{N}(\alpha))$ .

Let  $\Sigma(K')$  be the double branched cover of the knot  $K'$ , with covering function given by  $p : \Sigma(K') \rightarrow S^3$ . Now, since  $K'$  is the trivial knot,  $\Sigma(K')$  is homeomorphic to  $S^3$ . We know that  $\mathcal{N}(\alpha)$  is a 3-ball intersecting  $K'$  in two arcs, therefore  $p^{-1}(\mathcal{N}(\alpha))$  is a solid torus, and  $p^{-1}(\partial\mathcal{N}(\alpha))$  is a surface of genus one. Therefore,  $S^3 \setminus p^{-1}(\mathcal{N}(\alpha))$  is a double cover of  $S^3 \setminus \mathcal{N}(\alpha)$  branched along  $K \cap (S^3 \setminus \mathcal{N}(\alpha))$ . So to finish building the double branched cover of the knot  $K$ , all we have to do is to refill  $S^3 \setminus p^{-1}(\mathcal{N}(\alpha))$  appropriately.

Note that there exists a compressing disk for  $\partial(\mathcal{N}(\alpha)) \setminus K$  contained in  $\mathcal{N}(\alpha) \setminus K$ ; we denote this disk by  $D$ . As  $K \cap D = \emptyset$ ,  $|K' \cap D|$  is an even number, so the curve  $\partial D$  is lifted by  $p$  into two curves in  $p^{-1}(\partial\mathcal{N}(\alpha))$ ; we denote these curves by  $\Lambda_1$  and  $\Lambda_2$ . Let  $\Sigma'$  be the 3-manifold obtained by adding two 2-handles to the 3-manifold  $S^3 \setminus p^{-1}(\mathcal{N}(\alpha))$ , attached along the curves  $\Lambda_1$  and  $\Lambda_2$ ; we denote these 2-handles by  $\bar{\Lambda}_1$  and  $\bar{\Lambda}_2$ , respectively. So  $\Sigma' = [S^3 \setminus p^{-1}(\mathcal{N}(\alpha))] \cup \bar{\Lambda}_1 \cup \bar{\Lambda}_2$ .

We know that  $\Lambda_1 \cup \Lambda_2$  is a double cover of  $\partial D$  with covering function given by  $p|_{\Lambda_1 \cup \Lambda_2}$ . So we can extend the function  $p|_{\Lambda_1 \cup \Lambda_2}$  to  $\bar{\Lambda}_1 \cup \bar{\Lambda}_2$ , to get that  $\bar{\Lambda}_1 \cup \bar{\Lambda}_2$  is a double cover of  $\mathcal{N}(D)$ . Thus,  $\Sigma'$  is a double cover of  $[S^3 \setminus p^{-1}(\mathcal{N}(\alpha))] \cup \mathcal{N}(D)$  branched along two arcs of  $K$ .

We have that  $\partial([S^3 \setminus \mathcal{N}(\alpha)] \cup \mathcal{N}(D))$  consists of two 2-spheres and  $\partial\Sigma'$  also consists of two 2-spheres. The 2-spheres of  $\partial\Sigma'$  are a double cover of the two spheres of  $\partial([S^3 \setminus \mathcal{N}(\alpha)] \cup \mathcal{N}(D))$  branched over the points  $K \cap \partial([S^3 \setminus \mathcal{N}(\alpha)] \cup \mathcal{N}(D))$ .

Now we can fill the sphere boundary components of  $\Sigma'$  with 3-balls, and extend the function  $p$  to these 3-balls in order to get the double covering of  $S^3$  branched along the knot  $K$ .

The idea described above is known as the Montesinos trick. Similar to the previous construction, we will build the double branched covers of knots for which we know the tunnel number or the transient number. For the case of the tunnel number, note that if  $K$  has tunnel number  $n$ , then  $K$  is contained in a genus  $n + 1$  handlebody  $V$ , such that its complement is another genus  $n + 1$  handlebody  $W$ . By taking  $\Sigma[K]$ ,  $V$  and  $W$  lift to genus  $2n + 1$  handlebodies, that is, give a genus  $2n + 1$  Heegaard decomposition of  $\Sigma[K]$ . This shows that  $H_1(\Sigma[K])$  is an abelian group of rank at most  $2n + 1$ .

The following lemma is a general result of coverings which we will use often. The proof is a standard argument, so we omit it.

**Lemma 2.1.** *Let  $M$  be a manifold. Let  $\Sigma$  be a double cover of  $M$  with covering function  $p : \Sigma \rightarrow M$ ; and let  $C \subset M$ . If  $M$  is path connected and  $p^{-1}(C)$  is connected then  $\Sigma$  is connected.*

The following theorem is our first important result of this section. We will see that if we are given a transient system of a knot we can construct the double branched cover of this knot and from there calculate its first homology group.

**Theorem 2.2.** *If  $K$  is a knot in  $S^3$  such that  $\text{tr}(K) = n$ , then the first homology group of the double branched cover of  $K$  has a presentation with at most  $2n + 1$  generators.*

*Proof.* Let  $K$  be a knot in  $S^3$  such that  $\text{tr}(K) = n$ , let  $\{\tau_1, \tau_2, \dots, \tau_n\}$  be a transient system for  $K$ , and let  $T = \mathcal{N}(K \cup \tau_1 \cup \tau_2 \cup \dots \cup \tau_n)$ , this is a genus  $n + 1$  handlebody. Let  $K' \subset T$  be the trivial knot, such that  $K'$  is homotopic to  $K$  in  $T$ .

Let us define a family of compressing disks for  $\partial T$  properly embedded in  $T$ , say  $\{D_1, D_2, \dots, D_n, D_{n+1}\}$ , which satisfy the following properties:

- (1) For each  $i \in \{1, 2, \dots, n\}$  the disk  $D_i$  is properly embedded in  $\mathcal{N}(\tau_i)$ .
- (2) The disk  $D_{n+1}$  is properly embedded in  $\mathcal{N}(K)$  and is a compression disk for it.

All of these disks are properly embedded in  $T$ , so we can deduce that:

- (1) The family  $\{D_1, D_2, \dots, D_n, D_{n+1}\}$  is pairwise disjoint.
- (2) For each  $i \in \{1, 2, \dots, n\}$ ,  $|D_i \cup K| = 0$ .
- (3)  $|D_{n+1} \cap K| = 1$ .

Let  $\Sigma[K']$  be the double branched cover of  $K'$  with covering function given by  $p: \Sigma[K'] \rightarrow S^3$ . Note that  $\Sigma[K']$  is homeomorphic to  $S^3$ .

**Claim 2.3.** For each  $i \in \{1, 2, \dots, n\}$ ,  $p^{-1}(\partial D_i)$  has exactly two connected components, where each connected component is a simple closed curve in  $p^{-1}(\partial T)$ ; whereas  $p^{-1}(\partial D_{n+1})$  is a single simple closed curve in  $p^{-1}(\partial T)$ . Also, all these curves are disjoint in  $p^{-1}(\partial T)$ .

*Proof.* We know that  $|D_{n+1} \cap K| = 1$  and  $|D_i \cap K| = 0$  for all  $i \in \{1, 2, \dots, n\}$ . As  $K'$  is homotopic to  $K$  in  $T$ ,  $|D_{n+1} \cap K'|$  is an odd integer and  $|D_i \cap K'|$  is an even integer for all  $i \in \{1, 2, \dots, n\}$ . Therefore, for each  $i \in \{1, 2, \dots, n\}$  we have that  $p^{-1}(\partial D_i)$  has exactly two connected components in  $p^{-1}(\partial T)$ , where each connected component is a simple closed curve; and  $p^{-1}(\partial D_{n+1})$  is a simple closed connected curve in  $p^{-1}(\partial T)$ . Now, since the disks of the family  $\{D_1, D_2, \dots, D_{n+1}\}$  are pairwise disjoint, we have that all the curves are pairwise disjoint.  $\square$

**Claim 2.4.**  $p^{-1}(\partial T)$  is a connected, orientable surface with Euler characteristic  $-4n$  (and genus  $2n + 1$ ) contained in  $\Sigma[K']$ .

*Proof.* Note that  $\partial T$  is a genus  $n + 1$  surface, then  $\chi(\partial T) = -2n$ , and therefore  $\chi(p^{-1}(\partial T)) = 2\chi(\partial T) = -4n$ . Since  $\partial T$  is connected,  $p^{-1}(\partial T)$  is a double cover of  $\partial T$ ,  $\partial D_{n+1} \subset \partial T$  and  $p^{-1}(\partial D_{n+1})$  is a connected curve on  $p^{-1}(\partial T)$ . Then by Lemma 2.1 we have that  $p^{-1}(\partial T)$  is connected. Therefore  $p^{-1}(\partial T)$  is a connected orientable surface of Euler characteristic  $-4n$  (and of genus  $2n + 1$ ).  $\square$

**Claim 2.5.**  $p^{-1}(\partial T \setminus \bigcup_{j=1}^n \partial D_j)$  is connected.

*Proof.* Clearly  $\partial T \setminus \bigcup_{j=1}^n \partial D_j$  is connected. We have that  $p^{-1}(\partial T \setminus \bigcup_{j=1}^n \partial D_j)$  is a double cover of  $\partial T \setminus \bigcup_{j=1}^n \partial D_j$ , that  $\partial D_{n+1} \subset \partial T \setminus \bigcup_{j=1}^n \partial D_j$  and that  $p^{-1}(\partial D_{n+1})$  is a connected curve on  $p^{-1}(\partial T \setminus \bigcup_{j=1}^n \partial D_j)$ . Then using Lemma 2.1 we have that  $p^{-1}(\partial T \setminus \bigcup_{j=1}^n \partial D_j)$  is connected.  $\square$

By Claim 2.3 we know that for each  $i \in \{1, 2, \dots, n\}$  the curve  $\partial D_i$  lifts, under  $p$ , to exactly two simple closed curves in  $p^{-1}(\partial T)$ . Let us denote by  $\Lambda_1^i$  and  $\Lambda_2^i$  the two liftings of  $\partial D_i$  in  $p^{-1}(\partial T)$ , so  $\{\Lambda_1^1, \Lambda_2^1, \Lambda_1^2, \Lambda_2^2, \dots, \Lambda_1^n, \Lambda_2^n\}$  is a pairwise

disjoint collection of simple closed curves in  $p^{-1}(\partial T)$ . Also,  $\Lambda_1^i \cup \Lambda_2^i$  is a double cover of  $\partial D_i$  with  $p|_{\Lambda_1^i \cup \Lambda_2^i}$  the corresponding covering function. Then the functions  $p|_{\Lambda_1^i} : \Lambda_1^i \rightarrow \partial D_i$  and  $p|_{\Lambda_2^i} : \Lambda_2^i \rightarrow \partial D_i$  are homeomorphisms.

By Claim 2.3 we have that  $p^{-1}(D_{n+1})$  is a simple closed curve on  $p^{-1}(\partial T)$ . Let us denote by  $\Lambda$  the curve  $p^{-1}(\partial D_{n+1})$ . So  $\Lambda$  is a double cover for  $\partial D_{n+1}$  with covering function  $p|_{\Lambda} : \Lambda \rightarrow \partial D_{n+1}$ .

Let us introduce the notation

- $\text{Ext}(T) := S^3 \setminus T$ ,
- $\Sigma[\text{Ext}(T)] := \Sigma[K'] \setminus p^{-1}(T)$ .

Note that  $\Sigma[\text{Ext}(T)]$  is a double cover of  $\text{Ext}(T)$ , and  $\partial \Sigma[\text{Ext}(T)] = p^{-1}(\partial T)$ .

Let  $\Sigma[\text{Ext}(K)]$  be the 3-manifold obtained from  $\Sigma[\text{Ext}(T)]$  by adding a 2-handle along each of the members of the family of curves  $\{\Lambda_1^1, \Lambda_2^1, \Lambda_1^2, \Lambda_2^2, \dots, \Lambda_1^n, \Lambda_2^n\}$ . Since the functions  $p|_{\Lambda_r^i}$  are homeomorphisms for each  $i \in \{1, 2, \dots, n\}$  and  $r \in \{1, 2\}$ , we can extend each of these homeomorphisms to a homeomorphism whose domain is a disk whose boundary is the curve  $\Lambda_r^i$ , and which maps to the disk  $D_i$ . We then extend these last homeomorphisms to homeomorphisms from the 2-handle added along  $\Lambda_r^i$  to  $\mathcal{N}(D_i)$ . With this we conclude that  $\Sigma[\text{Ext}(K)]$  is a double cover of  $\text{Ext}(T) \cup (\bigcup_{j=1}^n \mathcal{N}(D_j))$ . Recall that the family of disks  $\{D_1, D_2, \dots, D_n\}$  was chosen such that  $\text{Ext}(T) \cup (\bigcup_{j=1}^n \mathcal{N}(D_j))$  is homeomorphic to  $\text{Ext}(K)$ . Therefore  $\Sigma[\text{Ext}(K)]$  is a double cover of  $\text{Ext}(K)$ .

On the other hand, from Claim 2.4 we know that  $p^{-1}(\partial T)$  is an orientable connected surface of genus  $2n+1$  and by Claim 2.5 we know that  $p^{-1}(\partial T \setminus \bigcup_{j=1}^n \partial D_j)$  is connected. Since  $\{\Lambda_1^1, \Lambda_2^1, \Lambda_1^2, \Lambda_2^2, \dots, \Lambda_1^n, \Lambda_2^n\}$  consist of  $2n$  curves and

$$p^{-1}\left(\partial T \setminus \bigcup_{j=1}^n \partial D_j\right) = p^{-1}(\partial T) \setminus \bigcup_{\substack{i \in \{1, 2, \dots, n\} \\ r \in \{1, 2\}}} \Lambda_r^i,$$

$\partial \Sigma[\text{Ext}(K)]$  is an orientable surface of genus one.

Now, note that  $\partial D_{n+1} \subset \partial \text{Ext}(K)$  since  $\partial D_{n+1} \subset \partial \mathcal{N}(K)$  and  $D_{n+1} \cap D_i = \emptyset$  for all  $i \in \{1, 2, \dots, n\}$ . Therefore we also have  $\Lambda \subset \partial \Sigma[\text{Ext}(K)]$ .

Let us define the 3-manifold  $\Sigma[K]$  obtained from  $\Sigma[\text{Ext}(K)]$  by adding a 2-handle along  $\Lambda$  on  $\partial \Sigma[\text{Ext}(K)]$ , and then complete with a 3-ball so that  $\Sigma[K]$  is a closed 3-manifold. Since  $p|_{\Lambda}$  is a two-to-one covering function then we can extend this function to a function that goes from a disk, whose boundary is  $\Lambda$ , to the disk  $D_{n+1}$ , where this extension is two-to-one branched at the point  $K \cap D_{n+1}$ . This last function is then extended to a function that goes from the 2-handle added along  $\Lambda$  to  $\mathcal{N}(D_{n+1})$ , where this function is two-to-one branched along the arc  $K \cap \mathcal{N}(D_{n+1})$ . Finally, this last function is extended to the added 3-ball, thus obtaining a function that goes from  $\Sigma[K]$  to  $S^3$  which is two-to-one branched along the knot  $K$ . From the above we conclude that  $\Sigma[K]$  is the double branched cover of  $K$ .



By Claim 2.4,  $p^{-1}(\partial T)$  is an orientable connected surface of genus  $2n + 1$  contained in  $S^3$ . Since  $\partial \Sigma[\text{Ext}(T)] = p^{-1}(\partial T)$  and  $\Sigma[\text{Ext}(T)] \subset \Sigma[K'] = S^3$ ,  $H_1(\Sigma[\text{Ext}(T)])$  is a free abelian group of rank  $2n + 1$ . So, let  $H_1(\Sigma[\text{Ext}(T)]) = \langle \theta_1, \theta_2, \dots, \theta_{2n+1} \rangle$ , where  $\theta_i$  for  $i \in \{1, 2, \dots, 2n + 1\}$  are generators.

Thus,  $H_1(\Sigma[K]) = \langle \theta_1, \theta_2, \dots, \theta_{2n+1} \mid \lambda_1^1, \lambda_1^2, \lambda_2^1, \lambda_2^2, \dots, \lambda_n^1, \lambda_n^2, \lambda \rangle$ , where  $\lambda$  and the  $\lambda_r^j$ , for  $j \in \{1, 2, \dots, n\}$  and  $r \in \{1, 2\}$ , correspond to the homology classes in  $H_1(\Sigma[\text{Ext}(T)])$  of the respective curves  $\Lambda$  and  $\Lambda_r^j$ .  $\square$

In the proof of Theorem 2.2, besides from proving the result, we construct the double cover of  $S^3$  branched along the knot for which we know the transient number. This construction will continue to be repeated throughout this work. Theorem 2.2 can be generalized to  $p$ -fold cyclic branched covers, with a similar proof.

**Theorem 2.6.** *If  $K$  is a knot in  $S^3$  such that  $\text{tr}(K) = n$ , then the first homology group of the  $p$ -fold cyclic branched cover of  $K$  has a presentation with at most  $pn + 1$  generators.*

The next lemma is a general result of the algebra of groups, which we will use for the proof of Theorems 2.8 and 2.10.

**Lemma 2.7.** *Let  $G_1$  and  $G_2$  be abelian groups such that*

$$G_1 = \langle \theta_1, \theta_2, \theta_3 : \lambda_1, \lambda_2, \lambda_3 \rangle \quad \text{and} \quad G_2 = \langle \beta_1, \beta_2 : \delta_1, \delta_2 \rangle.$$

*Suppose that there exist homomorphisms  $\Psi : \langle \theta_1, \theta_2, \theta_3 \rangle \rightarrow \langle \theta_1, \theta_2, \theta_3 \rangle$  and  $\Phi : \langle \theta_1, \theta_2, \theta_3 \rangle \rightarrow \langle \beta_1, \beta_2 \rangle$  between free abelian groups such that*

$$\begin{aligned} \Psi(\theta_1) &= \theta_2, & \Psi(\theta_2) &= \theta_1, & \Psi(\theta_3) &= \theta_3, \\ \Psi(\lambda_1) &= \lambda_2, & \Psi(\lambda_2) &= \lambda_1, & \Psi(\lambda_3) &= \lambda_3, \\ \Phi(\theta_1) &= \beta_1, & \Phi(\theta_2) &= \beta_1, & \Phi(\theta_3) &= 2\beta_2, \\ \Phi(\lambda_1) &= \delta_1, & \Phi(\lambda_2) &= \delta_1, & \Phi(\lambda_3) &= 2\delta_2. \end{aligned}$$

*If  $\lambda_1 = x\theta_1 + y\theta_2 + z\theta_3$  and  $G_2$  is the trivial group, then  $G_1$  is isomorphic to the finite cyclic group  $Z_{x-y}$ .*

*Proof.* Let  $a_{ij}$  be integers, with  $i, j \in \{1, 2, 3\}$ , such that

$$(1) \quad \begin{aligned} \lambda_1 &= a_{11}\theta_1 + a_{12}\theta_2 + a_{13}\theta_3, \\ \lambda_2 &= a_{21}\theta_1 + a_{22}\theta_2 + a_{23}\theta_3, \\ \lambda_3 &= a_{31}\theta_1 + a_{32}\theta_2 + a_{33}\theta_3. \end{aligned}$$

Applying the homomorphism  $\Psi$ , on both sides of the previous system of equations, we obtain

$$(2) \quad \begin{aligned} \lambda_2 &= \Psi(\lambda_1) = \Psi(a_{11}\theta_1 + a_{12}\theta_2 + a_{13}\theta_3) = a_{11}\theta_2 + a_{12}\theta_1 + a_{13}\theta_3, \\ \lambda_1 &= \Psi(\lambda_2) = \Psi(a_{21}\theta_1 + a_{22}\theta_2 + a_{23}\theta_3) = a_{21}\theta_2 + a_{22}\theta_1 + a_{23}\theta_3, \\ \lambda_3 &= \Psi(\lambda_3) = \Psi(a_{31}\theta_1 + a_{32}\theta_2 + a_{33}\theta_3) = a_{31}\theta_2 + a_{32}\theta_1 + a_{33}\theta_3. \end{aligned}$$

From the systems (1) and (2) we get

$$(3) \quad \begin{aligned} 0 &= (a_{11} - a_{22})\theta_1 + (a_{12} - a_{21})\theta_2 + (a_{13} - a_{23})\theta_3, \\ 0 &= (a_{12} - a_{21})\theta_1 + (a_{11} - a_{22})\theta_2 + (a_{13} - a_{23})\theta_3, \\ 0 &= (a_{31} - a_{32})\theta_1 + (a_{32} - a_{31})\theta_2. \end{aligned}$$

Since  $\langle \theta_1, \theta_2, \theta_3 \rangle$  is a free abelian group, from the system in (3) we have

$$a_{11} = a_{22}, \quad a_{12} = a_{21}, \quad a_{13} = a_{23}, \quad a_{31} = a_{32}.$$

Then the system (1) can be rewritten as

$$(4) \quad \begin{aligned} \lambda_1 &= a_1\theta_1 + a_2\theta_2 + a_3\theta_3, \\ \lambda_2 &= a_2\theta_1 + a_1\theta_2 + a_3\theta_3, \\ \lambda_3 &= a_4\theta_1 + a_4\theta_2 + a_5\theta_3, \end{aligned}$$

where  $a_1 = a_{11}$ ,  $a_2 = a_{12}$ ,  $a_3 = a_{23}$ ,  $a_4 = a_{31}$  and  $a_5 = a_{33}$ . Applying the homomorphism  $\Phi$  to the system (4) we obtain

$$(5) \quad \begin{aligned} \delta_1 &= \Phi(\lambda_1) = \Phi(a_1\theta_1 + a_2\theta_2 + a_3\theta_3) = (a_1 + a_2)\beta_1 + 2a_3\beta_2, \\ \delta_1 &= \Phi(\lambda_2) = \Phi(a_2\theta_1 + a_1\theta_2 + a_3\theta_3) = (a_2 + a_1)\beta_1 + 2a_3\beta_2, \\ 2\delta_2 &= \Phi(\lambda_3) = \Phi(a_4\theta_1 + a_4\theta_2 + a_5\theta_3) = 2a_4\beta_1 + 2a_5\beta_2. \end{aligned}$$

By properties of free abelian groups, we obtain from the last equation of the system (5) that

$$\delta_2 = a_4\beta_1 + a_5\beta_2.$$

So the system in (5) can be rewritten as

$$(6) \quad \begin{aligned} \delta_1 &= (a_1 + a_2)\beta_1 + 2a_3\beta_2, \\ \delta_2 &= a_4\beta_1 + a_5\beta_2. \end{aligned}$$

From the system (6) we see that the matrix  $A$ , given by

$$A = \begin{pmatrix} a_1 + a_2 & 2a_3 \\ a_4 & a_5 \end{pmatrix}$$

is the representation matrix of the group  $G_2 = \langle \beta_1, \beta_2 : \delta_1, \delta_2 \rangle$ . From the system in (4), doing an operation on rows, we see that the matrix  $\tilde{A}$ , given by

$$\tilde{A} = \begin{pmatrix} a_1 & a_2 & a_3 \\ a_1 + a_2 & a_1 + a_2 & 2a_3 \\ a_4 & a_4 & a_5 \end{pmatrix}$$

is a representation matrix of the group  $G_1$ .

By the Smith normal form theorem, there exists matrices  $S_1$  and  $S_2$  of order  $2 \times 2$ , invertible and with integer entries such that the matrix  $S_1 A S_2$  is a diagonal matrix with integer entries. From the Smith normal form theorem it is also known that the inverse matrices of  $S_1$  and  $S_2$  have integer entries, therefore  $\det S_1 = \pm 1$  and  $\det S_2 = \pm 1$ . Now, since  $G_2$  is the trivial group,  $\det A = \pm 1$ . So the matrix  $S_1 A S_2$  is of the form

$$(7) \quad S_1 A S_2 = \begin{pmatrix} \pm 1 & 0 \\ 0 & \pm 1 \end{pmatrix}.$$

From (7) we can ensure that there is a matrix  $S$  of order  $2 \times 2$ , invertible and with integer entries that satisfies

$$(8) \quad SA = \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 0 \\ 0 & 1 \end{pmatrix}.$$

Let us define the matrix

$$\tilde{S} = \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & S & \\ 0 & & \end{pmatrix}.$$

Clearly the matrix  $\tilde{S}$  has integer entries and using the result in (8) we have

$$(9) \quad \tilde{S} \tilde{A} = \begin{pmatrix} a_1 & a_2 & a_3 \\ 1 & 1 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 1 \end{pmatrix}.$$

Using elementary operations, from the matrix in (9) we obtain

$$\begin{pmatrix} a_1 - a_2 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 1 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 1 \end{pmatrix}.$$

From the above matrix we conclude that the group  $\langle \theta_1, \theta_2, \theta_3 : \lambda_1, \lambda_2, \lambda_3 \rangle$  is isomorphic to  $Z_{a_1 - a_2}$ , therefore the group  $G_1$  is isomorphic to  $Z_{a_1 - a_2}$ .  $\square$

The following result is well known to experts. We include a proof for completeness and because it will help us as a lemma in the proof of Theorem 2.10.

**Theorem 2.8.** *If  $K$  is a knot in  $S^3$  such that  $t(K) = 1$ , then the first homology group of the double branched cover of  $K$  is cyclic.*

*Proof.* Let  $K$  be a knot in  $S^3$  such that  $t(K) = 1$ , and let  $\tau$  be an unknotting tunnel for  $K$ . Let  $T = \mathcal{N}(K \cup \tau)$  and  $\text{Ext}(T) = S^3 \setminus T$ , so  $\text{Ext}(T)$  is a genus two handlebody. Since  $\text{Ext}(T)$  is a handlebody, we can ensure that there exists a knot  $K' \subset T$  such that  $K'$  is a trivial knot in  $S^3$  and it is homotopic to the knot  $K$  in  $T$ . Let  $\Sigma(K')$  be the double branched cover of the knot  $K'$  and let  $p : \Sigma(K') \rightarrow S^3$  be

the associated covering function. It is easy to notice, for the way it is defined  $T$ , that there are meridian disks  $D_1$  and  $D_2$  in  $T$  such that  $|D_1 \cap K| = 0$  and  $|D_2 \cap K| = 1$ . Since  $K'$  is homotopic to  $K$  in  $T$ ,  $|D_1 \cap K'|$  is an even integer and  $|D_2 \cap K'|$  is an odd integer. Therefore  $\partial D_1$  lifts, under  $p$ , to two simple closed curves; while  $\partial D_2$  lifts to exactly a single simple closed curve. Let us denote by  $\Lambda_1$  and  $\Lambda_2$  the liftings of  $\partial D_1$  and by  $\Lambda_3$  the lifting of  $\partial D_2$ . For each  $i \in \{1, 2, 3\}$  we attach a 2-handle to  $p^{-1}(\text{Ext}(T))$  along  $\Lambda_i \subset \partial(p^{-1}(\text{Ext}(T)))$ ; let us denote the 2-handle attached along  $\Lambda_i$  by  $\bar{\Lambda}_i$ . Let  $\Sigma$  be the 3-manifold obtained by attaching to  $p^{-1}(\text{Ext}(T))$  the 2-handles  $\bar{\Lambda}_i$ , that is:  $\Sigma := p^{-1}(\text{Ext}(T)) \cup (\bigcup_{i=1}^3 \bar{\Lambda}_i)$ .

Let us note the following observations:

- (1)  $\partial p^{-1}(\text{Ext}(T))$  is a genus three connected surface.
- (2)  $p^{-1}(\text{Ext}(T))$  is a double covering of  $\text{Ext}(T)$ .
- (3) The function  $p$  can be extended to  $\Sigma$ , such that  $\bar{\Lambda}_1 \cup \bar{\Lambda}_2$  is a double covering of  $\mathcal{N}(D_1)$  and  $\Lambda_3$  is a double covering of  $\mathcal{N}(D_2)$  branched along  $K \cap \mathcal{N}(D_2)$ .
- (4)  $\partial \Sigma$  is a 2-sphere.

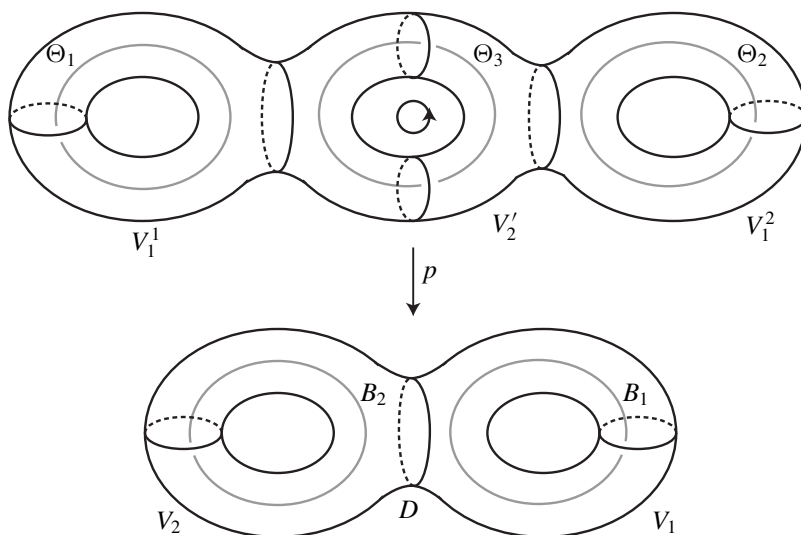
Let  $\Sigma(K)$  be the 3-manifold obtained by attaching a 3-ball to  $\Sigma$  along its boundary. So, we can extend the covering function  $p|_{p^{-1}(\text{Ext}(T))} : p^{-1}(\text{Ext}(T)) \rightarrow \text{Ext}(T)$  to a covering function  $p' : \Sigma(K) \rightarrow S^3$  which branches along the knot  $K$ . Therefore  $\Sigma(K)$  is the double covering of  $S^3$  branched along  $K$  with covering function given by  $p'$ .

We know that  $\text{Ext}(T)$  is a genus two handlebody, therefore  $H_1(\text{Ext}(T))$  is a free abelian group in two generators. Note that  $p^{-1}(\text{Ext}(T))$  is a genus three handlebody, therefore  $H_1(p^{-1}(\text{Ext}(T)))$  is a free abelian group in three generators.

**Claim 2.9.** There are two connected simple closed curves in  $\text{Ext}(T)$ , denoted by  $B_1$  and  $B_2$ , such that  $B_1$  lifts, by  $p$ , to two closed and connected simple curves, denoted by  $\Theta_1$  and  $\Theta_2$ ; while  $B_2$  lifts, by  $p$ , to exactly one simple curve closed, denoted by  $\Theta_3$ . If  $\beta_j$  is the homology class of  $B_j$  in  $H_1(\text{Ext}(T))$  and  $\theta_i$  is the homology class of  $\Theta_i$  in  $H_1(p^{-1}(\text{Ext}(T)))$  for all  $j \in \{1, 2\}$  and  $i \in \{1, 2, 3\}$ , then  $H_1(\text{Ext}(T)) = \langle \beta_1, \beta_2 \rangle$ ,  $H_1(p^{-1}(\text{Ext}(T))) = \langle \theta_1, \theta_2, \theta_3 \rangle$ .

*Proof.* Note that  $\text{Ext}(T)$  is a genus two handlebody, call it  $V$ . Let  $D$  be a disk in  $V$  which splits it in two solid tori  $V_1$  and  $V_2$ . Note that  $p^{-1}(V_i)$  double covers  $V_i$ ; thus, it is either a set of two solid tori or a solid torus that covers  $V_i$  two-to-one. There are two possibilities:

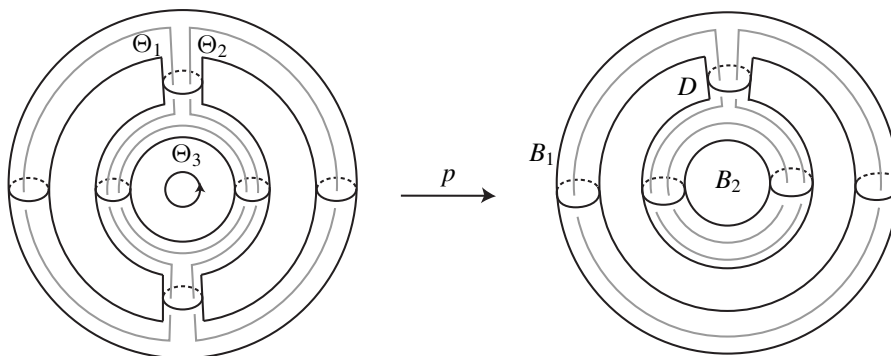
- (1)  $V_1$  is covered by two solid tori, say  $V_1^1$  and  $V_1^2$ , and  $V_2$  is covered two-to-one by a solid torus  $V_2'$ . See Figure 1.
- (2)  $V_1$  and  $V_2$  are covered both two-to-one by solid tori  $V_1'$  and  $V_2'$ . See Figure 2.



**Figure 1.**  $V_1$  is covered by two solid tori, say  $V_1^1$  and  $V_1^2$ , and  $V_2$  is covered two-to-one by a solid torus  $V_2'$ .

In case (1), take as  $B_i, i = 1, 2$ , a core of the solid tori  $V_i$ . Clearly  $B_1$  lifts to two simple closed curves  $\Theta_1$  and  $\Theta_2$ , which are a core of the solid tori  $V_1^1$  and  $V_1^2$ , and  $B_2$  lifts to a simple closed curve  $\Theta_3$  which is a core of the solid tori  $V_2'$ , and which cover two-to-one the curve  $B_2$ . In this case it is clear that the homology classes of the curves satisfy the required properties. See Figure 1.

In case (2), take as  $B_1$  a curve that goes once around each of the cores of  $V_1$  and  $V_2$  and intersects  $D$  in two points. In this case  $B_1$  lifts to two simple closed curves  $\Theta_1$  and  $\Theta_2$ , each of which goes once around  $V_1^1$  and  $V_1^2$ . Take as  $B_2$  a core of  $V_1$ , then clearly it lifts to a curve  $\Theta_3$  which covers  $B_2$  two-to-one. It is clear that the homology classes of the curves satisfy the required properties. See Figure 2.  $\square$



**Figure 2.**  $V_1$  and  $V_2$  are covered both two-to-one by solid tori  $V_1^1$  and  $V_2'$ .

We know that  $p^{-1}(\text{Ext}(T))$  is a double covering of  $\text{Ext}(T)$ , with covering function given by the restriction of  $p$ . Let  $p_* : H_1(p^{-1}(\text{Ext}(T))) \rightarrow H_1(\text{Ext}(T))$  be the homomorphism associated with the restriction of  $p$ . For each  $i \in \{1, 2, 3\}$ , let us denote by  $\lambda_i$  the homology class in  $H_1(p^{-1}(\text{Ext}(T)))$  associated to the curve  $\Lambda_i$ . Note that  $H_1(\Sigma[K]) = \langle \theta_1, \theta_2, \theta_3 : \lambda_1, \lambda_2, \lambda_3 \rangle$ . For each  $j \in \{1, 2\}$ , let us denote by  $\delta_j$  the homology class in  $H_1(\text{Ext}(T))$  associated to the curve  $\partial D_j$ . We have that  $H_1(\text{Ext}(T)) = \langle \beta_1, \beta_2 : \delta_1, \delta_2 \rangle$ . By choosing orientations conveniently, assume that

$$(10) \quad p_*(\lambda_1) = \delta_1, \quad p_*(\lambda_2) = \delta_1, \quad p_*(\lambda_3) = 2\delta_2.$$

According to Claim 2.9, we have that

$$(11) \quad p_*(\theta_1) = \beta_1, \quad p_*(\theta_2) = \beta_1, \quad p_*(\theta_3) = 2\beta_2.$$

Let  $q : p^{-1}(\text{Ext}(T)) \rightarrow p^{-1}(\text{Ext}(T))$  be the nontrivial covering transformation associated to the covering function  $p|_{p^{-1}(\text{Ext}(T))}$ . Let  $q_* : H_1(p^{-1}(\text{Ext}(T))) \rightarrow H_1(p^{-1}(\text{Ext}(T)))$  be the homomorphism induced by the covering transformation  $q$ . By Claim 2.9 we have that

$$(12) \quad \begin{aligned} q_*(\theta_1) &= \theta_2, & q_*(\theta_2) &= \theta_1, & q_*(\theta_3) &= \theta_3, \\ q_*(\lambda_1) &= \lambda_2, & q_*(\lambda_2) &= \lambda_1, & q_*(\lambda_3) &= \lambda_3. \end{aligned}$$

Then, applying Lemma 2.7 directly we have that  $H_1(\Sigma_2(K)) = \mathbb{Z}_{x-y}$ , where  $\lambda_1 = x\theta_1 + y\theta_2 + z\theta_3$ .  $\square$

Now we prove our main result.

**Theorem 2.10.** *If  $K$  is a knot in  $S^3$  such that  $\text{tr}(K) = 1$  then the first homology group of the double branched cover of  $K$  is cyclic.*

*Proof.* Let  $K$  be a knot in  $S^3$  such that  $\text{tr}(K) = 1$ , and let  $\{\tau\}$  be a transient system for the knot  $K$ . Let  $T = \mathcal{N}(K \cup \tau)$  and let  $K' \subset T$  be a trivial knot in  $S^3$  such that  $K'$  is homotopic to  $K$  in  $T$ . Define also the 3-manifold  $\text{Ext}(T)$  as  $\text{Ext}(T) := S^3 \setminus \text{Int}(T)$ .

As  $\partial T$  is a genus two surface in the exterior of the knot  $K'$ , which is trivial, it follows that  $\partial T$  is compressible in  $\text{Ext}(K')$ , that is, there is a compression disk  $E_1$  for  $\partial T$  disjoint from  $K'$ .

There are two possibilities for the disk  $E_1$ :

- (1) The disk  $E_1$  is a compression disk for  $\partial T$  lying in the interior of  $T$ .
- (2) The disk  $E_1$  is a compression disk for  $\partial T$  lying in the exterior of  $T$ .

Suppose first that we have case (1), that is,  $E_1$  lies in the interior of  $T$ . If  $E_1$  separates  $T$ , then by cutting along  $E_1$  we get two solid tori, one of them contains  $K'$ , and then there is a compression disk in the other solid tori which is nonseparating in  $T$ . So, we can assume that there is a compression disk  $E_1$  for  $\partial T$ , lying in  $T$ , and which does not separate  $T$ .

**Claim 2.11.** There exist a knot  $K''$  and a disk  $E_2$  in  $T$  such that:

- (1)  $E_2$  is a compression disk for  $\partial T$  which is properly embedded in  $T$ .
- (2)  $K''$  is a trivial knot in  $S^3$  and it is homotopic to  $K$  in  $T$ .
- (3)  $|E_2 \cap K''| = 1$ .

*Proof.* By cutting  $T$  along  $E_1$ , we get a solid torus  $V$ . The knot  $K'$  lies in  $V$ , and as  $K'$  represents a primitive element in  $\pi_1(T)$ , it must be homotopic to the core of  $V$ . If  $V$  is knotted, then  $\partial V$  is incompressible in  $\text{Ext}(K')$ , which is not possible, for  $K'$  is the trivial knot. Then  $V$  must be a standard solid torus in  $S^3$ . Then  $K'$  can be further homotoped to the core of  $V$ , which is a trivial knot in the 3-sphere. Then there is a disk  $E_2$  in  $V$  such that  $|E_2 \cap K''| = 1$ .  $\square$

Let  $\Sigma[K'']$  be the double cover of  $S^3$  branched along  $K''$  with covering function given by  $p : \Sigma[K''] \rightarrow S^3$ . The disks  $E_1$  and  $E_2$  form a meridian disk system for  $T$ , and as  $K''$  is disjoint from  $E_1$  and intersects  $E_2$  in one point, it follows that  $p^{-1}(T)$  is a genus three handlebody,  $p^{-1}(E_1)$  consists of two disks and  $p^{-1}(E_2)$  consists of a single disk which covers two-to-one the disk  $E_2$ . Note that these disks form a meridian system for  $p^{-1}(T)$ . Let  $B_i = \partial E_i$ ,  $i = 1, 2$ . Denote by  $\Theta_1$  and  $\Theta_2$  the two components of  $p^{-1}(B_1)$ , and let  $\Theta_3 = p^{-1}(B_2)$ . As  $\Sigma[K'']$  is the 3-sphere, and  $p^{-1}(T)$  is a genus three handlebody, it follows that the homology classes of the curves  $\Theta_i$ ,  $i = 1, 2, 3$ , generate  $H_1(p^{-1}(\text{Ext}(T)))$ .

Let  $D_1$  and  $D_2$  be compression disks in the interior of  $T$  such that  $D_1$  is properly embedded in  $\mathcal{N}(\tau)$  and  $D_2$  is properly embedded in  $\mathcal{N}(K)$ , such that  $|D_1 \cap K| = 0$  and  $|D_2 \cap K| = 1$ . Note that the disks  $D_1$  and  $D_2$  do not separate  $T$ . As  $K''$  is homotopic to  $K$  in  $T$ ,  $|D_1 \cap K''|$  is an even number and  $|D_2 \cap K''|$  is an odd number. Therefore  $\partial D_1$  lifts, under  $p$ , to two simple closed curves, while  $\partial D_2$  lifts exactly to a single simple closed curve. Denote by  $\Lambda_1$  and  $\Lambda_2$  the liftings of  $\partial D_1$  and by  $\Lambda_3$  the lifting of  $\partial D_2$ . Attach 2-handles to the 3-manifold  $p^{-1}(\text{Ext}(T))$  along the curves  $\Lambda_i$ , note that these curves lie in  $\partial(p^{-1}(\text{Ext}(T)))$ , and denote the 2-handle attached along  $\Lambda_i$  by  $\bar{\Lambda}_i$ . Let  $\Sigma$  be the 3-manifold obtained by attaching to  $p^{-1}(\text{Ext}(T))$  the 2-handles  $\bar{\Lambda}_i$ .

Note that  $p^{-1}(\text{Ext}(T))$  is a double covering of  $\text{Ext}(T)$ , with covering function  $p'$  given by  $p' = p|_{p^{-1}(\text{Ext}(T))}$ . The function  $p'$  can be extended to a function  $p' : \Sigma \rightarrow \text{Ext}(T) \cup N(D_1) \cup N(D_2)$ , such that  $\bar{\Lambda}_1 \cup \bar{\Lambda}_2$  is a double covering of  $\mathcal{N}(D_1)$  and  $\bar{\Lambda}_3$  is a double covering of  $\mathcal{N}(D_2)$  branched along  $K \cap \mathcal{N}(D_2)$ .

Note that  $\partial \Sigma$  is a 2-sphere. Let  $\Sigma(K)$  be the 3-manifold obtained by attaching a 3-ball to  $\Sigma$  along its boundary. We can extend the covering function  $p'$  to a covering function  $\hat{p} : \Sigma(K) \rightarrow S^3$ , which branches along  $K$ . Therefore  $\Sigma(K)$  is the double cover of  $S^3$  branched along  $K$  with covering function given by  $\hat{p}$ .

As  $p^{-1}(\text{Ext}(T))$  is a double covering of  $\text{Ext}(T)$ , with covering function given by the restriction of  $p$ , let  $p_* : H_1(p^{-1}(\text{Ext}(T))) \rightarrow H_1(\text{Ext}(T))$  be the homomorphism induced by  $p$ . For each  $i \in \{1, 2, 3\}$  denote by  $\lambda_i$  the homology class in  $H_1(p^{-1}(\text{Ext}(T)))$  associated to the curve  $\Lambda_i$ . For each  $j \in \{1, 2\}$  denote by  $\delta_j$  the homology class in  $H_1(\text{Ext}(T))$  associated to the curve  $\partial D_j$ . Then

$$(13) \quad p_*(\lambda_1) = \delta_1, \quad p_*(\lambda_2) = \delta_1, \quad p_*(\lambda_3) = 2\delta_2.$$

Note that  $H_1(\text{Ext}(T))$  is a free abelian group in two generators, generated by the homology classes of the curves  $B_1$  and  $B_2$ , which we denote by  $\beta_1$  and  $\beta_2$ . As we said before,  $H_1(p^{-1}(\text{Ext}(T)))$  is a free abelian group in three generators, generated by the homology classes of the curves  $\Theta_i$ , which we denote by  $\theta_i$ ,  $i = 1, 2, 3$ . We have that

$$(14) \quad H_1(\text{Ext}(T)) = \langle \beta_1, \beta_2 \rangle, \quad H_1(p^{-1}(\text{Ext}(T))) = \langle \theta_1, \theta_2, \theta_3 \rangle$$

We also obtain that

$$(15) \quad H_1(\text{Ext}(T)) = \langle \beta_1, \beta_2 : \delta_1, \delta_2 \rangle, \quad H_1(\Sigma[K]) = \langle \theta_1, \theta_2, \theta_3; \lambda_1, \lambda_2, \lambda_3 \rangle,$$

$$(16) \quad p_*(\theta_1) = \beta_1, \quad p_*(\theta_2) = \beta_1, \quad p_*(\theta_3) = 2\beta_2.$$

Let  $q : p^{-1}(\text{Ext}(T)) \rightarrow p^{-1}(\text{Ext}(T))$  be the nontrivial covering transformation, associated to the covering function  $p$ . Let  $q_* : H_1(p^{-1}(\text{Ext}(T))) \rightarrow H_1(p^{-1}(\text{Ext}(T)))$  be the homomorphism associated to the covering transformation  $q$ . By the way that  $\theta_i$  and the  $\lambda_i$  were defined we have that

$$(17) \quad \begin{aligned} q_*(\theta_1) &= \theta_2, & q_*(\theta_2) &= \theta_1, & q_*(\theta_3) &= \theta_3, \\ q_*(\lambda_1) &= \lambda_2, & q_*(\lambda_2) &= \lambda_1, & q_*(\lambda_3) &= \lambda_3. \end{aligned}$$

Applying Lemma 2.7 we have that  $H_1(\Sigma(K)) = \mathbb{Z}_{x-y}$ , where  $\lambda_1 = x\theta_1 + y\theta_2 + z\theta_3$ . So, we have proved that if the compression disk  $E_1$  is contained in  $T$ , then the homology group of the double branched cover of  $K$  is cyclic.

Now suppose that we have case (2), that is, the compression disk  $E_1$  is contained in  $\text{Ext}(T)$ . In this situation we can suppose that  $\text{Ext}(T)$  is not a handlebody, for otherwise we have that  $t(K) = 1$  and by Theorem 2.8 we get the desired result. Suppose first that the disk  $E_1$  does not separate  $\text{Ext}(T)$ . Define  $\Gamma = T \cup \mathcal{N}(E_1)$ . As  $E_1$  does not divide  $\partial T$  then  $\partial\Gamma$  is a connected genus one surface, and it must bound a solid torus. Then  $\Gamma$  is a solid torus, for otherwise  $\text{Ext}(T)$  will be a genus two handlebody. So,  $\Gamma$  is a knotted solid torus and  $K'$  lies on it. As  $K'$  is a trivial knot, it must lie in a 3-ball contained in  $\Gamma$ , for otherwise there will be an incompressible torus in  $\text{Ext}(K)$ . In particular,  $K'$  has winding number zero in  $\Gamma$ . Then  $K$  is also of winding number zero in  $\Gamma$ , as it is homotopic to  $K'$  in  $T \subset \Gamma$ . Embed  $\Gamma$  in  $S^3$  so that it is a standard solid torus  $V$ , and that a preferred longitude



of  $\Gamma$  goes to a preferred longitude of  $V$ . Let  $\bar{K}$  be the image of  $K$  in  $V$ . Then  $K$  is a satellite knot with pattern given by  $\bar{K}$ . As  $\bar{K}$  has winding number zero in  $V$ , it follows that  $H_1(\Sigma[\bar{K}])$  is isomorphic to  $H_1(\Sigma[K])$ , by [12]. Let  $\bar{T}$  be the image of  $T$  in  $V$ , clearly  $\bar{T}$  is the neighborhood of  $\bar{K}$  union a transient arc, and the exterior of  $\bar{T}$  is the exterior of  $V$ , which is a solid torus, union a 1-handle given by the image of the disk  $E_1$ . This shows  $\bar{K}$  is a tunnel number one knot and then  $H_1(\Sigma[\bar{K}])$  is a cyclic group, which implies then that  $H_1(\Sigma[K])$  is also cyclic.

Suppose now that the disk  $E_1$  separates  $\text{Ext}(T)$  and that there is no nonseparating compression disk in  $\text{Ext}(T)$ . Let  $\Gamma = T \cup \mathcal{N}(E_1)$ . As  $E_1$  is separating,  $\partial\Gamma$  consist of two tori, say  $S_1$  and  $S_2$ . Then  $S_1$  bounds a solid torus  $V_1$  which contains  $\Gamma$ , and also contains  $S_2$ . Then  $V_1$  is a knotted solid torus, and as  $K$  is contained in  $V_1$ , it must lie inside a 3-ball, and then as in the previous case,  $K$  has winding number zero in  $V_1$ . Embed  $V_1$  in  $S^3$  so that it is a standard solid torus  $V_2$ , and such that a preferred longitude of  $V_1$  goes to a preferred longitude of  $V_2$ . Let  $\bar{K}$  be the image of  $K$  in  $V_2$ . Then  $K$  is a satellite knot with pattern given by  $\bar{K}$ . As  $\bar{K}$  has winding number zero in  $V$ , it follows that  $H_1(\Sigma[\bar{K}])$  is isomorphic to  $H_1(\Sigma[K])$ , by [12]. Let  $\bar{T}$  be the image of  $T$  in  $V$ , clearly  $\bar{T}$  is the neighborhood of  $\bar{K}$  union a transient arc, and the exterior of  $\bar{T}$  is the exterior of  $V$ , which is a solid torus union a manifold bounded by the image of  $S_2$  plus 1-handle given by the image of the disk  $E_1$ . It follows that  $\bar{K}$  is a transient number one knot such that the exterior of the knot union a transient arc is compressible, and it has a nonseparating compression disk. By the previous case,  $H_1(\Sigma[\bar{K}])$  is a cyclic group, which implies then that  $H_1(\Sigma[K])$  is also cyclic.  $\square$

### 3. Knots with large transient number

By the results of Section 2, we can now estimate the transient number of some knots.

**Theorem 3.1.** *Let  $K$  be a knot such that its double branched cover is not a homology sphere, that is,  $H_1(\Sigma[K])$  is not trivial. Then*

- (1)  $\text{tr}(K \# K) \geq 2$ ;
- (2)  $\text{tr}(K_n) \geq (n - 1)/2$ , where  $K_n = K \# K \# \cdots \# K$ , is the connected sum of  $n$  copies of  $K$ .

*Proof.* It is known that  $\Sigma[K_n] = \Sigma[K] \# \Sigma[K] \# \cdots \# \Sigma[K]$ , the connected sum of  $n$  copies of  $\Sigma[K]$ . As  $H_1(\Sigma[K])$  is not trivial,  $H_1(\Sigma[K_n])$  has rank at least  $n$ . By Theorem 2.2,  $\text{tr}(K_n) \geq (n - 1)/2$ , this shows (2). In particular  $H_1(\Sigma[K_2]) = H_1(\Sigma[K]) + H_1(\Sigma[K])$ , which is not cyclic, and this implies (1).  $\square$

This shows that there are knots with arbitrarily large transient number, which answers a question of Koda and Ozawa [2].

Now we concentrate on the tables of knots up to crossing number 10.

10 <sub>99</sub>	{2, {9, 9}}, {6, {2, 2, 6, 6, 0, 0, 0, 0}}
10 <sub>123</sub>	{2, {11, 11}}, {5, {2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2}}
12a <sub>427</sub>	{2, {15, 15}}, {4, {3, 3, 3, 3, 15, 15}}, {6, {4, 4, 20, 20, 0, 0, 0, 0}}
12a <sub>435</sub>	{2, {3, 75}}, {6, {2, 2, 8, 200, 0, 0, 0, 0}}
12a <sub>465</sub>	{6, {2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 38, 9158}}
12a <sub>466</sub>	{6, {2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 26, 5434}}
12a <sub>475</sub>	{6, {2, 2, 2, 10, 20, 340, 0, 0}}
12a <sub>647</sub>	{2, {3, 51}}, {6, {2, 2, 2, 34, 0, 0, 0, 0}}
12a <sub>868</sub>	{5, {2, 2, 2, 2, 8, 8, 88, 88}}
12a <sub>975</sub>	{2, {5, 45}}, {4, {5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 45}}
12a <sub>990</sub>	{2, {3, 75}}, {6, {2, 2, 8, 200, 0, 0, 0, 0}}
12a <sub>1019</sub>	{2, {19, 19}}, {5, {6, 6, 6, 6, 6, 6, 6, 6}}
12a <sub>1102</sub>	{6, {2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 112, 34160}}
12a <sub>1105</sub>	{2, {17, 17}}, {6, {2, 2, 2, 2, 10, 10, 170, 170}}
12a <sub>1167</sub>	{5, {2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 82, 82}}
12a <sub>1229</sub>	{5, {2, 2, 2, 2, 8, 8, 8, 8}}
12a <sub>1288</sub>	{2, {3, 39}}, {6, {2, 2, 2, 26, 0, 0, 0, 0}}
12n <sub>518</sub>	{2, {3, 21}}, {6, {2, 2, 4, 28, 0, 0, 0, 0}}
12n <sub>533</sub>	{6, {2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 42, 0, 0}}
12n <sub>604</sub>	{2, {3, 27}}, {6, {2, 2, 2, 18, 0, 0, 0, 0}}
12n <sub>605</sub>	{2, {3, 3}}, {6, {2, 2, 2, 2, 0, 0, 0, 0}}
12n <sub>706</sub>	{2, {7, 7}}, {5, {3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3}}, {6, {2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 14, 14}}
12n <sub>840</sub>	{6, {2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 10, 1190}}
12n <sub>879</sub>	{5, {2, 2, 2, 2, 4, 4, 4, 4}}
12n <sub>888</sub>	{2, {3, 15}}, {6, {2, 2, 2, 10, 0, 0, 0, 0}}

**Table 1.** List of the knots with the corresponding homology group needed for the proof of Theorem 3.3.

**Theorem 3.2.** (1) *These knots have transient number 2:* 8<sub>18</sub>, 9<sub>35</sub>, 9<sub>37</sub>, 9<sub>40</sub>, 9<sub>41</sub>, 9<sub>46</sub>, 9<sub>47</sub>, 9<sub>48</sub>, 9<sub>49</sub>, 10<sub>74</sub>, 10<sub>75</sub>, 10<sub>98</sub>, 10<sub>99</sub>, 10<sub>103</sub>, 10<sub>123</sub>, 10<sub>155</sub>, 10<sub>157</sub>.

(2) *These knots have transient number at most 2:* 8<sub>16</sub>, 9<sub>29</sub>, 9<sub>32</sub>, 9<sub>38</sub>, 10<sub>61</sub>, 10<sub>62</sub>, 10<sub>63</sub>, 10<sub>64</sub>, 10<sub>65</sub>, 10<sub>66</sub>, 10<sub>67</sub>, 10<sub>68</sub>, 10<sub>69</sub>, 10<sub>79</sub>, 10<sub>80</sub>, 10<sub>81</sub>, 10<sub>83</sub>, 10<sub>85</sub>, 10<sub>86</sub>, 10<sub>87</sub>, 10<sub>89</sub>, 10<sub>90</sub>, 10<sub>92</sub>, 10<sub>93</sub>, 10<sub>94</sub>, 10<sub>96</sub>, 10<sub>97</sub>, 10<sub>100</sub>, 10<sub>101</sub>, 10<sub>105</sub>, 10<sub>106</sub>, 10<sub>108</sub>, 10<sub>109</sub>, 10<sub>110</sub>, 10<sub>111</sub>, 10<sub>112</sub>, 10<sub>115</sub>, 10<sub>116</sub>, 10<sub>117</sub>, 10<sub>120</sub>, 10<sub>121</sub>, 10<sub>122</sub>, 10<sub>140</sub>, 10<sub>142</sub>, 10<sub>144</sub>, 10<sub>148</sub>, 10<sub>149</sub>, 10<sub>150</sub>, 10<sub>151</sub>, 10<sub>152</sub>, 10<sub>153</sub>, 10<sub>154</sub>, 10<sub>158</sub>, 10<sub>160</sub>, 10<sub>162</sub>, 10<sub>163</sub>, 10<sub>165</sub>.

(3) *Any other knot of crossing number at most 10 has transient number one.*

*Proof.* According to the information given in KnotInfo [3], the knots in (1) and (2) are precisely the knots with crossing number up to 10, whose unknotting number and tunnel number are both larger than 1. So, any other knot has unknotting number

or tunnel number equal to 1, and then has transient number 1. The knots in (1) are precisely the knots whose double branched cover has noncyclic first homology group, and furthermore these knots have tunnel number 2. Therefore its transient number must be two. The knots in (2) have tunnel number two but their double branched cover has cyclic first homology group; hence we cannot detect the transient number yet.  $\square$

A similar result can be done for the knots of crossing number 11 or 12.

The following knots are interesting, for we use the homology of  $p$ -branched covers of a knot to determine the transient number.

**Theorem 3.3.** *These knots have transient number 2:  $10_{99}, 10_{123}, 12a_{427}, 12a_{435}, 12a_{465}, 12a_{466}, 12a_{475}, 12a_{647}, 12a_{742}, 12a_{801}, 12a_{868}, 12a_{975}, 12a_{990}, 12a_{1019}, 12a_{1102}, 12a_{1105}, 12a_{1167}, 12a_{1206}, 12a_{1229}, 12a_{1288}, 12n_{518}, 12n_{533}, 12n_{604}, 12n_{605}, 12n_{642}, 12n_{706}, 12n_{840}, 12n_{879}, 12n_{888}$ .*

*Proof.* According to Theorem 2.6, if  $K$  has  $\text{tr}(K) = 1$ , then  $\text{rank}(H_1(\Sigma_p[K])) \leq p + 1$ . Using this and the information given in KnotInfo [3], we show that these knots cannot have transient number one. As they have tunnel number two, they must also have transient number two. In Table 1, there is a list of the knots with the corresponding homology group needed for the proof. For some of them, it is enough to use the homology of  $\Sigma[K]$ , but not for all. A symbol  $\{6, \{2, 2, 2, 10, 20, 340, 0, 0\}\}$  means that  $H_1(\Sigma_6[K]) = \mathbb{Z}_2 + \mathbb{Z}_2 + \mathbb{Z}_2 + \mathbb{Z}_{10} + \mathbb{Z}_{20} + \mathbb{Z}_{340} + \mathbb{Z} + \mathbb{Z}$ .  $\square$

#### 4. Transient number and connected sums

It is natural to consider the behavior of a knot invariant with respect to connected sums. It is easy to see that

$$u(K_1 \# K_2) \leq u(K_1) + u(K_2),$$

and equality is conjectured. It is also not difficult to see that

$$t(K_1 \# K_2) \leq t(K_1) + t(K_2) + 1.$$

There are known examples of knots with  $t(K_1 \# K_2) = t(K_1) + t(K_2) + 1$  [6], examples with  $t(K_1 \# K_2) = t(K_1) + t(K_2)$ , and examples with  $t(K_1 \# K_2) < t(K_1) + t(K_2)$  [4]. So, we can expect a similar inequality for the transient number.

**Theorem 4.1.** *Let  $K_1, K_2$  be knots in  $S^3$ . Then*

$$\text{tr}(K_1 \# K_2) \leq \text{tr}(K_1) + \text{tr}(K_2) + 1.$$

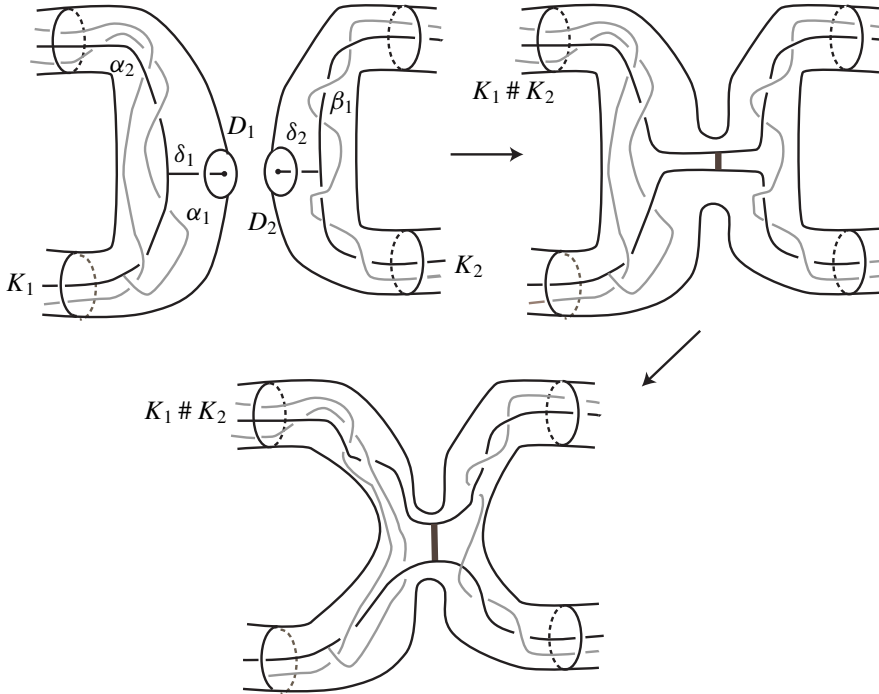
*Proof.* Let  $K_1$  be a knot with transient number  $\text{tr}(K) = n$ , and let  $\{\gamma_1, \gamma_2, \dots, \gamma_n\}$  be a system of transient arcs for  $K_1$ . Let  $T_1 = \mathcal{N}(K \cup \gamma_1 \cup \gamma_2 \cup \dots \cup \gamma_n)$ . Then  $T_1$  is a genus  $n + 1$  handlebody with the property that  $K_1$  can be homotoped in the interior

of  $T_1$  to the trivial knot in  $S^3$ . We can assume that the homotopy that transform  $K_1$  into the trivial knot can be realized by a sequence of ambient isotopies of  $K_1$  and crossing changes. So, suppose that after making isotopies, all crossing changes are performed simultaneously. Suppose  $r$  crossing changes are performed, numbered  $1, 2, \dots, r$ , and for each crossing change let  $\alpha_i$  be an arc with endpoints in  $K_1$  which remembers the crossing change, that is, if  $B_i$  is a regular neighborhood of  $\alpha_i$ , in fact a 3-ball that intersects  $K_1$  in two unknotted arcs, then a crossing change can be performed inside each  $B_i$  to get the trivial knot. Make an isotopy to move  $K_1$  to its original position, and then  $\{\alpha_1, \alpha_2, \dots, \alpha_r\}$  is a collection of disjoint arcs with endpoints in  $K_1$  contained in  $T_1$ . Let  $\delta_1$  be an arc in  $T_1$  with an endpoint in  $K_1$  and the other in  $\partial N(K_1)$ , such that  $\delta_1$  is disjoint from the arcs  $\alpha_i$ .

If  $K_2$  is knot with  $\text{tr}(K_2) = m$ , then as above there is a genus  $m + 1$  handlebody that is the neighborhood of  $K$  union a system of transient arcs  $\{\gamma'_1, \gamma'_2, \dots, \gamma'_m\}$ , and there is a collection of arcs  $\{\beta_1, \dots, \beta_s\}$  that determines crossing changes that unknot  $K_2$ . Let  $\delta_2$  be an arc in  $T_2$  with an endpoint in  $K_2$  and the other in  $\partial N(K_2)$ , such that  $\delta_2$  is disjoint from the arcs  $\beta_i$ .

Suppose that  $T_1$  and  $T_2$  lie in disjoint 3-balls  $C_1$  and  $C_2$  contained in  $S^3$ . Suppose that  $\partial T_i \cap \partial C_i$  consists of a disk  $D_i$ , such that the endpoint of  $\delta_i$  lying in  $\partial T_i$ , it lies in  $D_i$ , for  $i = 1, 2$ . Do a disk sum of  $T_1$  and  $T_2$ , identifying  $D_1$  and  $D_2$ , such that the endpoints of  $\delta_1$  and  $\delta_2$  coincide. Let  $\delta = \delta_1 \cup \delta_2$ , this is an arc with an endpoints in  $K_1$  and  $K_2$ . Following  $\delta$ , do a band sum of  $K_1$  and  $K_2$ . As  $K_1$  and  $K_2$  lie in disjoint 3-balls, this band sum is in fact a connected sum  $K_1 \# K_2$ . Let  $T = T_1 \cup T_2$ , this is a genus  $n + m + 2$  handlebody, and  $K_1 \# K_2$  can be homotoped to the trivial knot inside it, to see that just do crossing changes following the arcs  $\alpha_i$  and  $\beta_j$ . Now note that  $T$  is the regular neighborhood of  $K_1 \# K_2$  and a system of  $n + m + 1$  arcs, that is, the  $n$  arcs for a system of  $K_1$ , the  $m$  arcs for a system of  $K_2$ , plus one more arc which is dual to the band used to perform the connected sum of  $K_1$  and  $K_2$ ; see Figure 3. This shows that the transient number of  $K_1 \# K_2$  is at most  $n + m + 1$ .  $\square$

In many cases we can ensure that  $\text{tr}(K_1 \# K_2)$  is at most  $\text{tr}(K_1) + \text{tr}(K_2)$ . For example, if the arc systems that unknot  $K_1$  and  $K_2$  are disjoint from a meridian disk  $E_1$  for  $N(K_1)$  and a meridian disk  $E_2$  for  $N(K_2)$ , then at most  $\text{tr}(K_1) + \text{tr}(K_2)$  arcs are needed to unknot  $K_1 \# K_2$ . To see this consider handlebodies  $T_1$  and  $T_2$  as above, and disjoint 3-balls  $C_1$  and  $C_2$  that contain them, such that  $T_i$  and  $C_i$  intersect in a disk  $D_i$ . We can suppose that the boundary of the disk  $E_i$  intersects  $D_i$  in a single arc. Instead of doing a band sum of  $T_1$  and  $T_2$ , cut  $T_i$  along  $E_i$ , and identify the two copies of  $E_1$  with the corresponding copies for  $E_2$ , this is like doing a connected sum  $T_2 \# T_2$  between  $T_1$  and  $T_2$ . We get a genus  $n + m + 1$  handlebody  $T'$ . Note that  $K_1 \# K_2$  is contained in the handlebody  $T'$ . Now consider the arcs  $\alpha_i$  and  $\beta_j$  as in the above proof. These arcs are disjoint from the meridian



**Figure 3.** The arcs and sum  $K_1 \# K_2$  described in the proof of Theorem 4.1.

disks  $E_i$ , and then they are contained in  $T'$ . Then these arcs can be used to unknot  $K_1 \# K_2$ , which then have transient number at most  $n + m = \text{tr}(K_1) + \text{tr}(K_2)$ .

There are examples of knots  $K_1$  and  $K_2$ , such that  $t(K_1) = 1 = t(K_2)$ , but  $t(K_1 \# K_2) = 3$  [6]. For these examples, it is clear that

$$\text{tr}(K_1) = 1 = \text{tr}(K_2),$$

but it is not clear what is  $\text{tr}(K_1 \# K_2)$ .

There are also examples of knots  $K_1$  and  $K_2$ , such that  $t(K_1) = 2$ ,  $t(K_2) = 1$ , but  $t(K_1 \# K_2) = 2$  [5]. In this case

$$\text{tr}(K_2) = 1 \quad \text{and} \quad \text{tr}(K_1 \# K_2) \leq 2,$$

but it is not clear whether  $\text{tr}(K_1) = 1$  or  $2$ .

It is well known that knots with unknotting number one or tunnel number one are prime, but the proofs are not so easy. The first proof that knots  $K$  with  $u(K) = 1$  are prime [10] uses heavy combinatorial arguments, a second proof uses sutured manifold theory [11], and a third proof depends on double branched covers and deep results on Dehn surgery on knots [14]. There are also two proofs that tunnel number one knots are prime, one uses combinatorial group theory [7], and the other

uses combinatorial arguments [9]. A proof that transient number one knots are prime would imply both, that unknotting number one and tunnel number one knots are prime, so it may not be easy to prove that. However it seems reasonable to conjecture the following.

**Conjecture 4.2.** If  $K$  is a knot with  $\text{tr}(K) = 1$  then  $K$  is prime.

Theorem 3.1(1) gives some evidence for this conjecture.

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MARIO EUDAVE-MUÑOZ  
INSTITUTO DE MATEMÁTICAS  
UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL AUTÓNOMA DE MÉXICO  
MEXICO CITY  
MEXICO  
mario@im.unam.mx

JOAN CARLOS SEGURA-AGUILAR  
INSTITUTO DE MATEMÁTICAS  
UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL AUTÓNOMA DE MÉXICO  
MEXICO CITY  
MEXICO  
joancarlos28@gmail.com





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Kyoto University  
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Department of Mathematics  
University of Oregon  
Eugene, OR 97403  
[lipshitz@uoregon.edu](mailto:lipshitz@uoregon.edu)

Kefeng Liu  
Department of Mathematics  
University of California  
Los Angeles, CA 90095-1555  
[liu@math.ucla.edu](mailto:liu@math.ucla.edu)

Dimitri Shlyakhtenko  
Department of Mathematics  
University of California  
Los Angeles, CA 90095-1555  
[shlyakht@ipam.ucla.edu](mailto:shlyakht@ipam.ucla.edu)

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
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