

Zeitschrift: L'Enseignement Mathématique
Herausgeber: Commission Internationale de l'Enseignement Mathématique
Band: 49 (2003)
Heft: 3-4: L'ENSEIGNEMENT MATHÉMATIQUE

Artikel: THE BASIC GERBE OVER A COMPACT SIMPLE LIE GROUP
Autor: Meinrenken, Eckhard
Kapitel: 1. Introduction
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-66691>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 15.08.2025

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

THE BASIC GERBE OVER A COMPACT SIMPLE LIE GROUP

by Eckhard MEINRENKEN

ABSTRACT. Let G be a compact, simply connected simple Lie group. We give a construction of an equivariant gerbe with connection on G , with equivariant 3-curvature representing a generator of $H_G^3(G, \mathbf{Z})$. Among the technical tools developed in this context is a gluing construction for equivariant bundle gerbes.

1. INTRODUCTION

Let G be a compact, simply connected simple Lie group, acting on itself by conjugation. It is well-known that the cohomology of G , and also its equivariant cohomology, is trivial in degree less than three and that $H^3(G, \mathbf{Z})$ and $H_G^3(G, \mathbf{Z})$ are canonically isomorphic to \mathbf{Z} . The generator of $H^3(G, \mathbf{Z})$ is represented by a unique bi-invariant differential form $\eta \in \Omega^3(G)$, admitting an equivariantly closed extension $\eta_G \in \Omega_G^3(G)$ in the complex of equivariant differential forms. Our goal in this paper is to give an explicit, finite-dimensional description of an equivariant gerbe over G , with equivariant 3-curvature η_G .

A number of constructions of gerbes over compact Lie groups can be found in the literature, using different models of gerbes and valid in various degrees of generality. The differential geometry of gerbes was initiated by Brylinski's book [8], building on earlier work of Giraud. In this framework gerbes are viewed as sheafs of groupoids satisfying certain axioms. Brylinski gives a general construction of a gerbe with connection, for any integral closed 3-form on any 2-connected manifold M . The argument uses the path fibration $P_0M \rightarrow M$, and is similar to the well-known construction of a line bundle with connection out of a given integral closed 2-form on a simply connected manifold. In a later paper [9], Brylinski gives a finite-dimensional description of the sheaf of groupoids defining the basic gerbe for any compact Lie group G .

A less abstract picture, developed by Chatterjee-Hitchin [10, 18, 19], describes gerbes in terms of *transition line bundles* similar to the presentation of line bundles in terms of transition functions. A detailed construction of transition line bundles for the basic gerbe over $G = \mathrm{SU}(N)$ (as well as for the much more complicated case of finite quotients of $G = \mathrm{SU}(N)$) was obtained by Gawędzki-Reis [13].

In this paper, we will extend the Gawędzki-Reis approach from $\mathrm{SU}(N)$ to other simply connected simple Lie groups G . A fundamental difficulty in the more general case is that, in contrast to the case $G = \mathrm{SU}(N)$, the pull-back of a generator of $H_G^3(G, \mathbf{Z})$ to a conjugacy class $\mathcal{C} \subset G$ may not vanish. In this case it is impossible to describe the basic gerbe in terms of a G -invariant cover and G -equivariant transition line bundles. Compare with the case of G -equivariant line bundles over G -manifolds M : Such a line bundle may be described in terms of a G -invariant cover and G -invariant transition functions only if its pull-back to any G -orbit is equivariantly trivial.

One way of getting around this problem is to extend the Chatterjee-Hitchin theory to the equivariant case, as in [9, Appendix A]. A lift of the group action to a given gerbe is obtained by specifying the isomorphisms between the gerbe and its pull-back under the action of group elements $g \in G$. Unfortunately, the conditions for such isomorphisms to define a group action become rather complicated. A second possibility, adopted in this paper, is to use Murray's theory of *bundle gerbes* [24].

To explain our approach in more detail, let us first discuss the simplest case of $G = \mathrm{SU}(d+1)$, where it is equivalent to the construction in Gawędzki-Reis. The eigenvalues of any matrix $A \in \mathrm{SU}(d+1)$ can be uniquely written in the form

$$\exp(2\pi i \lambda_1(A)), \dots, \exp(2\pi i \lambda_{d+1}(A))$$

where $\lambda_1(A), \dots, \lambda_{d+1}(A) \in \mathbf{R}$ satisfy $\sum_{i=1}^{d+1} \lambda_i(A) = 0$ and

$$\lambda_1(A) \geq \lambda_2(A) \geq \dots \geq \lambda_{d+1}(A) \geq \lambda_1(A) - 1.$$

Define an open cover V_1, \dots, V_d, V_{d+1} of G , where V_j consists of those matrices A for which the j th inequality becomes strict. Over the set G_{reg} of regular elements, where all inequalities are strict, we have $d+1$ line bundles L_1, \dots, L_d, L_{d+1} defined by the eigenlines for the eigenvalues $\exp(2\pi i \lambda_j(A))$. For $i < j$, the tensor product $L_{i+1} \otimes \dots \otimes L_j \rightarrow G_{\mathrm{reg}}$ extends to a line bundle $L_{ij} \rightarrow V_i \cap V_j$. (One may view L_{ij} as the top exterior power of the sum of eigenspaces for the eigenvalues in the given range.) For $i < j < k$ we have a canonical isomorphism $L_{ij} \otimes L_{jk} \cong L_{ik}$ over the triple intersection $V_i \cap V_j \cap V_k$.

The L_{ij} , together with these isomorphisms, define a gerbe over $SU(d+1)$, representing the generator of $H^3(SU(d+1), \mathbb{Z})$.

More generally, consider any compact, simply connected, simple Lie group G of rank d . Up to conjugacy, G contains exactly $d+1$ elements with semi-simple centralizer. (For $G = SU(d+1)$, these are the central elements.) Let $\mathcal{C}_1, \dots, \mathcal{C}_{d+1} \subset G$ be their conjugacy classes. We will define an invariant open cover V_1, \dots, V_{d+1} of G , with the property that each member of this cover admits an equivariant retraction onto the conjugacy class $\mathcal{C}_j \subset V_j$. It turns out that every semi-simple centralizer has a distinguished central extension by $U(1)$. This central extension defines an equivariant bundle gerbe on \mathcal{C}_j , hence (by pull-back) an equivariant bundle gerbe over V_j . We will find that these gerbes over V_j glue together to produce a gerbe over G , using a gluing rule developed in this paper.

The organization of the paper is as follows. In Section 2 we review the theory of gerbes and pseudo-line bundles with connections, and discuss 'strong equivariance' under a group action. Section 4 describes gluing rules for bundle gerbes. Section 3 summarizes some facts about gerbes coming from central extensions. In Section 5 we give the construction of the basic gerbe over G outlined above, and in Section 6 we study the 'pre-quantization of conjugacy classes'.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS. I would like to thank Ping Xu for fruitful discussions at the Poisson 2002 meeting in Lisbon, and for a preliminary version of his preprint [2] with Behrend and Zhang, giving yet another construction of the basic gerbe over G . Their (infinite-dimensional) approach is based on the notion of Morita equivalence of (quasi-)symplectic groupoids. I thank the referees for detailed comments and suggestions.

2. GERBES WITH CONNECTIONS

In this section we review gerbes on manifolds, along the lines of Chatterjee-Hitchin and Murray.

2.1 CHATTERJEE-HITCHIN GERBES

Let M be a manifold. Any Hermitian line bundle over M can be described by an open cover U_a , and transition functions $\chi_{ab}: U_a \cap U_b \rightarrow U(1)$ satisfying a cocycle condition $(\delta\chi)_{abc} = \chi_{bc}\chi_{ac}^{-1}\chi_{ab} = 1$ on triple intersections. The