

## RATIONAL HOMOTOPY OF GAUGE GROUPS

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ABSTRACT. In this brief paper, we observe that basic results from rational homotopy theory provide formulas for the rational homotopy groups of gauge groups of principal bundles  $K \rightarrow P \rightarrow B$  in terms of the rational homotopy groups of  $K$  and cohomology groups of  $B$  alone.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Let  $K \rightarrow P \xrightarrow{\xi} B$  be a continuous principal  $K$ -bundle, where  $K$  is a compact connected Lie group. Denote by  $G(\xi)$  the gauge group of  $\xi$ : that is, the set of all  $K$ -equivariant self-homeomorphisms of  $P$  over  $B$ . Also, denote by  $G_1(\xi)$  the subgroup of  $G(\xi)$  consisting of the self-homeomorphisms that preserve the basepoint of  $P$ . (It is common in the subject to take for  $G_1(\xi)$  the self-homeomorphisms that fix a given fibre  $K$ , but because  $G(\xi)$  consists of equivariant maps, this is equivalent to our definition above.) The topology of gauge groups has been considered by many authors; see, for instance, [5], [2] or [11]. Indeed, the study of the homotopy theory of gauge groups (under a different name) goes back to [5].

Now, there is an obvious homeomorphism of groups  $G_1(\xi) \cong \text{Map}_*(P, K)_K$ , where the subscript  $K$  on the mapping space denotes the space of *equivariant* maps with respect to the free (principal) action of  $K$  on  $P$  and the *conjugation* action of  $K$  on  $K$ . In [16], S. Terzić shows that when  $B$  is a closed simply connected 4-manifold, there is a formula for the ranks of the homotopy groups  $\pi_j(G(\xi))$  and  $\pi_j(G_1(\xi))$  in terms of the ranks of the homotopy of  $K$  and homology of  $B$  alone (see Corollary 3.3).

Also, when  $K$  is abelian, we clearly have  $G_1(\xi) = \text{Map}_*(P, K)_K = \text{Map}_*(B, K)$ . For  $\dim(B) \leq 4$ , it was shown in [12] that even when  $K$  is non-abelian, there is a weak equivalence between  $G_1(\xi)$  and  $\text{Map}_*(B, K)$ . In certain cases, this result can be extended beyond these cases (see Corollary 2.2). Indeed, more recently, in [18, 19], C. Wockel shows that for principal bundles  $K \rightarrow P \xrightarrow{\xi} S^m$ , there is an identification of homotopy types  $\text{Map}_*(P, K)_K \simeq \text{Map}_*(S^m, K)$  (and a consequent isomorphism  $\pi_q(G_1(\xi)) = \pi_{q+m}(K)$  over  $\mathbb{Z}$ ).

The purpose of this short paper is simply to observe that the philosophy of the preceding paragraph, in the framework of rational homotopy theory, allows the derivation of a *general* formula (see Theorem 3.1) for the rational homotopy

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groups of the gauge groups  $G(\xi)$  and  $G_1(\xi)$  which, in particular, recovers Wockel's isomorphism (over the rationals) when the base is a sphere and specializes to the formula of Terzić when the base is a 4-manifold. Because these results are of interest to non-topologists, we have tried to include as many details as possible within the confines of a desire for conciseness.

## 2. HOMOTOPY TYPE OF GAUGE GROUPS

One basic result of the theory of gauge groups says the following.

**Theorem 2.1.** *For a principal bundle  $K \rightarrow P \xrightarrow{\xi} B$  with classifying map  $f: B \rightarrow B_K$ ,*

$$G(\xi) = \text{Map}(P, K)_K \simeq \Omega \text{Map}(B, B_K; f)$$

and

$$G_1(\xi) = \text{Map}_*(P, K)_K \simeq \Omega \text{Map}_*(B, B_K; f).$$

This theorem may be proved in several ways. For instance, it was shown in [5, Theorems 5.2 and 5.6, Proposition 4.3] that  $G(\xi)$  and  $G_1(\xi)$  are the fibres in fibrations with the mapping spaces  $\text{Map}(B, B_K; f)$  and  $\text{Map}_*(B, B_K; f)$ , respectively, as base spaces and with (essentially) contractible total spaces. Also see [2, Theorem 3.3 and Corollary 5.7] and [11, Chapter 2].

In general, if  $W$  has the homotopy type of an  $H$ -space (for instance, a topological group or a loop space), then all the components of  $\text{Map}(Z, W)$  have the same homotopy type, because multiplication with  $f$  provides an equivalence  $\text{Map}(Z, W; *) \xrightarrow{\cong} \text{Map}(Z, W; f)$ . Furthermore, if  $Z = \Sigma X$  is a suspension (or, more generally, if  $Z$  is an associative co- $H$ -space), then all components of  $\text{Map}_*(Z, W) = \text{Map}_*(\Sigma X, W) \simeq \text{Map}_*(X, \Omega W; f)$ . Therefore, under these types of conditions, we have equivalences  $\text{Map}_*(Z, W; f) \simeq \text{Map}_*(Z, W; *)$ . Furthermore, we also have the general equality  $\Omega \text{Map}_*(Z, W; f) \simeq \Omega \text{Map}_*(Z, W; *) = \text{Map}_*(Z, \Omega W)$ . Thus, using the fact that  $\Omega B_K \simeq K$ , we obtain

**Corollary 2.2** ([11, Theorem 2.2.4]). *If all the components of  $\text{Map}_*(B, B_K)$  have the same homotopy type, then*

$$G_1(\xi) \simeq \text{Map}_*(B, K).$$

The hypothesis of Corollary 2.2 is not always satisfied. For instance, in [8] A. Kono constructs principal  $SU(2)$ -fibrations  $\xi$  and  $\xi'$  over  $S^4$  with  $G(\xi) \neq G(\xi')$ . In this case, all the components of  $\text{Map}(B, B_K)$  do not have the same homotopy type.

On the other hand, over the rational numbers we can generalize Corollary 2.2 to obtain

**Theorem 2.3.** *When  $B$  has the homotopy type of a connected finite CW complex, there are rational homotopy equivalences*

$$G(\xi) \simeq_{\mathbb{Q}} \text{Map}(B, K) \quad \text{and} \quad G_1(\xi) \simeq_{\mathbb{Q}} \text{Map}_*(B, K).$$

*Proof.* The mapping space  $\text{Map}(B, B_K; f)$  is a nilpotent space whose rationalization is the space  $\text{Map}(B, (B_K)_{\mathbb{Q}}; f_{\mathbb{Q}})$  (see [6, Theorems II.2.5 and II.3.11] and [7] for more details on free mapping spaces). Moreover, we know that the rational

cohomology of  $B_K$  is a polynomial algebra (see [4, Theorem 1.81 and Example 2.42] for example). More specifically, the cohomology of a compact connected Lie group is an exterior algebra  $H^*(K; \mathbb{Q}) = \wedge(u_1, \dots, u_r)$  with  $u_i \in H^{2n_i-1}(K; \mathbb{Q})$ , and the Serre spectral sequence for the universal bundle  $K \rightarrow E_K \rightarrow B_K$  leads to  $H^*(B_K; \mathbb{Q}) = \mathbb{Q}[v_1, \dots, v_r]$ , a polynomial algebra with  $v_i \in H^{2n_i}(B_K; \mathbb{Q})$ . Since cohomology corresponds in general to homotopy classes of maps, we have  $H^{2n_i}(B_K; \mathbb{Q}) = [B_k, K(\mathbb{Q}, 2n_i)]$ , for each  $i = 1, \dots, r$ . We then obtain a map

$$B_K \rightarrow \prod_{i=1}^r K(\mathbb{Q}, 2n_i)$$

which clearly induces an isomorphism on rational cohomology (as well as homology) and is, therefore, a rational equivalence. Hence, the rationalization  $(B_K)_{\mathbb{Q}}$  is an  $H$ -space (since a product of  $K(\mathbb{Q}, j)$ 's clearly is), so  $\text{Map}(B, (B_K)_{\mathbb{Q}}; f_{\mathbb{Q}})$  has the homotopy type of  $\text{Map}(B, (B_K)_{\mathbb{Q}}; *)$ . Then

$$G(\xi) \simeq \Omega \text{Map}(B, B_K; f) \simeq_{\mathbb{Q}} \Omega \text{Map}(B, (B_K)_{\mathbb{Q}}; *) \simeq \text{Map}(B, K_{\mathbb{Q}}),$$

since  $\Omega B_K \simeq K$ .

The exact same argument applies to the based mapping space  $\text{Map}_*(B, B_K; f)$  and  $G_1(\xi)$ .  $\square$

*Remark 2.4.* The same argument as in the proof applied to the cohomology algebra  $H^*(K; \mathbb{Q}) = \wedge(u_1, \dots, u_r)$  of a compact connected Lie group  $K$  shows that, rationally,  $K$  is also a product of Eilenberg-Mac Lane spaces: that is,

$$K_{\mathbb{Q}} \simeq \prod_{i=1}^r K(\mathbb{Q}, 2n_i - 1).$$

### 3. RATIONAL HOMOTOPY OF GAUGE GROUPS

We now use Theorem 2.3 to compute rational homotopy groups of gauge groups for *any finite connected base space*  $B$ . Recall that  $K \rightarrow P \xrightarrow{\xi} B$  is a continuous principal bundle with  $K$  a compact connected Lie group.

**Theorem 3.1.** *If  $B$  has the homotopy type of a finite connected CW complex, then for any  $q \geq 1$ , we have*

$$\pi_q(G(\xi)) \otimes \mathbb{Q} \cong \sum_{r \geq 0} H^r(B; \mathbb{Q}) \otimes \pi_{r+q}(K)$$

and

$$\pi_q(G_1(\xi)) \otimes \mathbb{Q} \cong \sum_{r \geq 0} \tilde{H}^r(B; \mathbb{Q}) \otimes \pi_{r+q}(K),$$

where  $\tilde{H}$  denotes reduced cohomology.

*Remark 3.2.* Note that since  $H^r(B; \mathbb{Q})$  is a rational vector space, there is no need to write  $\pi_{r+q}(K) \otimes \mathbb{Q}$ . Also, recall that for path-connected  $X$ , the term *reduced cohomology* means that  $\tilde{H}^j(X) = H^j(X)$  for  $j \geq 1$  and  $\tilde{H}^0(X) = 0$ . Finally, there has been much work on the rational homotopy groups of mapping spaces. See, for example, [17, 10, 3, 1]. Each of these papers uses the minimal model theory of Sullivan, but in the following proof, the fact that  $K$  is very simple over  $\mathbb{Q}$  allows us to take a more elementary approach.

*Proof.* By Theorem 2.3, we have the rational equivalences  $G(\xi) \simeq_{\mathbb{Q}} \text{Map}(B, K)$  and  $G_1(\xi) \simeq_{\mathbb{Q}} \text{Map}_*(B, K)$ . Consider  $\pi_q(G_1(\xi)) \otimes \mathbb{Q} = \pi_q(\text{Map}_*(B, K)) \otimes \mathbb{Q}$ . Because it is true in general that  $\pi_q(\text{Map}_*(X, Y)) = [\Sigma^q X, Y]$ , and by the universal property of localization we have

$$\begin{aligned} \pi_q(\text{Map}_*(B, K)) \otimes \mathbb{Q} &= [\Sigma^q B, K]_{\mathbb{Q}} = [\Sigma^q B, K_{\mathbb{Q}}] \\ &= [\Sigma^q B, \prod_{i=1}^r K(\mathbb{Q}, 2n_i - 1)] \quad \text{by Remark 2.4} \\ &= \prod_{i=1}^r [\Sigma^q B, K(\mathbb{Q}, 2n_i - 1)] \\ &= \bigoplus_{i=1}^r H^{2n_i - 1 - q}(B; \mathbb{Q}) \\ &= \bigoplus_{r \geq 0} \tilde{H}^r(B; \mathbb{Q}) \otimes \pi_{r+q}(K), \end{aligned}$$

where, in the last line, we have replaced  $2n_i - 1$  by  $r + q$  and recognized that the only non-zero terms occur in degrees  $j$  where  $\pi_j(K) \otimes \mathbb{Q} \neq 0$ .

Now, for  $\mathcal{H}$  an  $H$ -space, we always have the following relationship between free and based mapping spaces (see [9, Proposition 4.9] or [7] for instance):

$$\text{Map}(X, \mathcal{H}; *) \simeq \mathcal{H} \times \text{Map}_*(X, \mathcal{H}; *).$$

Thus, since all components of  $\text{Map}(B, (B_K)_{\mathbb{Q}})$  have the same homotopy type, we can apply this result to see that

$$\pi_q(G(\xi)) \otimes \mathbb{Q} = \pi_q(\text{Map}(B, K_{\mathbb{Q}}; *)) = \pi_q(K) \otimes \mathbb{Q} \oplus \pi_q(\text{Map}_*(B, K_{\mathbb{Q}}; )),$$

and the formula for  $\pi_q(G(\xi)) \otimes \mathbb{Q}$  follows. □

Of course, if  $B = S^m$ , then we recover Wockel’s result over  $\mathbb{Q}$ ,  $\pi_q(G_1(\xi)) \otimes \mathbb{Q} = \pi_{q+m}(K) \otimes \mathbb{Q}$ . Moreover, if the base  $B$  of the principal bundle is a closed simply connected 4-manifold, then  $H^1(B; \mathbb{Q}) = 0 = H^3(B; \mathbb{Q})$  and  $H^4(B; \mathbb{Q}) = \mathbb{Q}$ . Hence, from the general formulas above, we obtain

**Corollary 3.3** (Terzić’s Formula [16, Propositions 1 and 2]). *If  $K \rightarrow P \rightarrow B$  is a principal bundle (as above) with  $B$  a closed simply connected 4-manifold with second Betti number  $b_2(B)$ , then*

$$\text{rank}(\pi_q(G(\xi))) = b_2(B) \cdot \text{rank}(\pi_{q+2}(K)) + \text{rank}(\pi_{q+4}(K)) + \text{rank}(\pi_q(K))$$

and

$$\text{rank}(\pi_q(G_1(\xi))) = b_2(B) \cdot \text{rank}(\pi_{q+2}(K)) + \text{rank}(\pi_{q+4}(K)).$$

Note that because the formula only involves ranks of homotopy groups, it is in fact a result about rational homotopy groups. Also, since the non-zero rational homology of  $B$  occurs only in even-degrees and the non-zero rational homotopy of  $K$  occurs only in odd degrees, all even-degree rational homotopy of the gauge groups vanishes. For the same reasons, this will also be true whenever  $B$  has  $H^{\text{odd}}(B; \mathbb{Q}) = 0$ . In particular, we have

**Example 3.4.** If  $K \rightarrow P \xrightarrow{\xi} \mathbb{C}P^m$  is a principal bundle, then  $\pi_q(G(\xi)) \otimes \mathbb{Q} = 0 = \pi_q(G_1(\xi)) \otimes \mathbb{Q}$  for  $q$  even and, for  $q$  odd,

$$\pi_q(G(\xi)) \otimes \mathbb{Q} = \bigoplus_{i=0}^m \pi_{q+2i}(K) \otimes \mathbb{Q} \quad \text{and} \quad \pi_q(G_1(\xi)) \otimes \mathbb{Q} = \bigoplus_{i=1}^m \pi_{q+2i}(K) \otimes \mathbb{Q}.$$

These observations can be put in a wider context. A space  $B$  is said to be *rationally elliptic* if its rational homotopy and rational homology are both finite dimensional. For instance, spheres and homogeneous spaces are rationally elliptic. If a rationally elliptic  $B$  also has positive Euler characteristic,  $\chi(B) > 0$ , then it is known that  $H^{\text{odd}}(B; \mathbb{Q}) = 0$  (see [4, Theorem 2.75] for instance). Therefore, by the discussion above,

$$\pi_{\text{even}}(G(\xi)) \otimes \mathbb{Q} = 0 = \pi_{\text{even}}(G_1(\xi)) \otimes \mathbb{Q}$$

for any principal bundle  $K \rightarrow P \xrightarrow{\xi} B$ . The connection to geometry arises from two sources (see [4, Section 6.4] for a fuller discussion). First, there is the conjecture of Raoul Bott that compact manifolds of positive sectional curvature are rationally elliptic. Second, there is the conjecture of Heinz Hopf that even-dimensional compact manifolds of positive sectional curvature have positive Euler characteristics. If both these conjectures are true, then by what we have said above, the even-degree rational homotopy groups of gauge groups vanish. This elicits the following question:

**Question 3.5.** Let  $K \rightarrow P \xrightarrow{\xi} B$  be a principal bundle. If  $B^{2m}$  is a compact manifold with positive sectional curvature (in some metric), then is it true that

$$\pi_{\text{even}}(G(\xi)) \otimes \mathbb{Q} = 0 = \pi_{\text{even}}(G_1(\xi)) \otimes \mathbb{Q}?$$

#### 4. THE GAUGE GROUP OF THE UNIVERSAL BUNDLE

Because it classifies all principal  $K$ -bundles, the most important principal bundle is the universal bundle  $\xi_u: K \rightarrow E_K \rightarrow B_K$ . Thus, its gauge group is of interest. Unfortunately, in the proof of Theorem 3.1, we needed the base space of the bundle to be a finite complex in order to be able to localize mapping spaces. Of course, this is not the case for  $B_K$ . Nevertheless, we can still compute the rational homotopy groups of  $G(\xi_u)$  by making use of the more algebraic framework of rational homotopy theory (see [4] for instance) and, in particular, a theorem of Smith [13].

Let  $\text{aut}_1(X) = \text{Map}(X, X; 1_X)$ , the monoid of self-homotopy equivalences of  $X$  homotopic to the identity  $1_X$ . There is a classifying space  $\text{Baut}_1(X)$  with the usual property that  $\Omega \text{Baut}_1(X) = \text{aut}_1(X)$ . There is a general way to study the rational homotopy type of  $\text{Baut}_1(X)$  from the viewpoint of commutative differential graded algebras and differential graded Lie algebras (see, for instance, [14, 15]). This viewpoint equates the rational homotopy groups with the homology of the complex of degree-lowering derivations on the minimal model of  $X$ . We will not go into details about models since the following special case is all that we need.

**Theorem 4.1** ([13, Theorem 2 and Corollary 2]). *If  $X$  is a rational  $H$ -space of finite type, then*

$$\pi_q(\text{aut}_1(X)) \otimes \mathbb{Q} = \pi_q(\Omega \text{Baut}_1(X)) \otimes \mathbb{Q} = \text{Der}^q(H^*(X; \mathbb{Q})),$$

where  $\text{Der}^q(H^*(X; \mathbb{Q}))$  is the vector space of derivations on the cohomology algebra which lower degree by  $q$ .

Recall that  $X$  is a rational  $H$ -space if its  $\mathbb{Q}$ -localization is an  $H$ -space. In fact, we have already used the fact that  $B_K$  is a rational  $H$ -space of finite type in the proof of Theorem 2.3, so Theorem 4.1 applies to  $B_K$ . Indeed, as we described in the proof of Theorem 2.3,  $H^*(B_K; \mathbb{Q}) = \mathbb{Q}[v_1, \dots, v_r]$ , a polynomial algebra with  $v_i \in H^{2n_i}(B_K; \mathbb{Q})$ ; so Hopf's classification says that  $B_K \simeq_{\mathbb{Q}} \prod_i K(\mathbb{Q}, 2n_i)$ , with the  $v_i$ 's corresponding to a basis for the rational homotopy groups. Therefore  $B_K$  is an  $H$ -space after rationalization.

Now, by Theorem 2.1, the gauge group of the universal bundle is given by  $G(\xi_u) = \Omega \text{Map}(B_K, B_K; 1) = \Omega(\text{aut}_1 B_K)$ . By Theorem 4.1, we can then compute the gauge group from the derivations of cohomology  $\text{Der}^*(H^*(B_K; \mathbb{Q})) = \text{Der}^*(\mathbb{Q}[u_\alpha])$ . The derivations of this algebra are particularly easy to understand. In particular, a basis for the derivations which lower degree by  $q + 1$  consists of those derivations that are non-zero on a single generator  $u_t$  (in degree  $t$ , say) and have image any element in degree  $t - q - 1$ . Since the  $u_\alpha$  generate  $\pi_\alpha(B_K)$  and  $\mathbb{Q}[u_\alpha] = H^*(B_K; \mathbb{Q})$ , we can make the identification

$$\text{Der}^{q+1}(\mathbb{Q}[u_\alpha]) = \bigoplus_{t \geq 0} H^{t-q-1}(B_K; \mathbb{Q}) \otimes \pi_t(B_K).$$

We then obtain the same formula as in Theorem 3.1, but now for the universal bundle having infinite-dimensional base  $B_K$ .

**Theorem 4.2.**

$$\pi_q(G(\xi_u)) \otimes \mathbb{Q} = \bigoplus_{r \geq 0} H^r(B_K; \mathbb{Q}) \otimes \pi_{q+r}(K).$$

*Proof.*

$$\begin{aligned} \pi_q(G(\xi_u)) \otimes \mathbb{Q} &= \pi_q(\Omega(\text{aut}_1 B_K, 1)) \otimes \mathbb{Q} \\ &= \pi_{q+1}(\text{aut}_1 B_K, 1) \otimes \mathbb{Q} \\ &= \text{Der}^{q+1}(\mathbb{Q}[u_\alpha]) \\ &= \bigoplus_t H^{t-q-1}(B_K; \mathbb{Q}) \otimes \pi_t(B_K) \\ &= \bigoplus_r H^r(B_K; \mathbb{Q}) \otimes \pi_{q+r}(K), \end{aligned}$$

where we have used the general facts that  $\pi_j(\Omega X) = \pi_{j+1}(X)$  and  $\pi_j(K) = \pi_{j+1}(B_K)$ . This is, of course, the same result as in Theorem 3.1.  $\square$

The gauge group has many equivalent definitions (see [11, Chapter 2]). For the universal bundle, the most homotopically interesting one is

$$G(\xi_u) = \text{Map}(E_K, K)_K,$$

the mapping space of equivariant maps  $E_K \rightarrow K$ , where the action on  $K$  is by conjugation. In homotopy theory, this is exactly the definition of the *homotopy fixed set*  $K^{hK}$  of the conjugation action. In general, it is very difficult to obtain explicit information about  $K^{hK}$ . Here, as a byproduct, we find

**Corollary 4.3.** *Let  $K$  act on itself by conjugation. Then the rational homotopy groups of the homotopy fixed set are given by*

$$\pi_q(K^{hK}) \otimes \mathbb{Q} = \bigoplus_{r \geq 0} H^r(B_K; \mathbb{Q}) \otimes \pi_{q+r}(K).$$

The homotopy fixed set  $K^{hK}$  (and  $G(\xi_u)$ ) may also be identified with the space of sections of the associated fibre bundle  $K_K \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} E_K \times_K K \rightarrow B_K$ , where again the action of  $K$  on itself is by conjugation. Yet one more tantalizing connection arises from the following folklore identification. Because we cannot find a reference, we give a brief outline of the proof.

**Lemma 4.4.** *The bundle  $K_K = E_K \times_K K \rightarrow B_K$  is homotopy equivalent to the free loop space fibration  $B_K^{S^1} \rightarrow B_K$ .*

*Proof.* We outline the proof in steps.

**Step 1.** First define an action  $(K \times K) \times K \rightarrow K$  by  $(g, h) \cdot k = g \cdot k \cdot h^{-1}$ . Then it is straightforward to show that  $\phi: (E_K \times E_K)/K \rightarrow K_{(K \times K)}$ ,  $\phi([x, y]) = [x, y, e]$ , is a homeomorphism, where  $K$  acts on  $E_K \times E_K$  diagonally (on the right in both factors),  $K_{(K \times K)}$  is the Borel construction for the action defined above and  $e$  is the identity of  $K$ . An inverse is given by  $\phi^{-1}([x, y, e]) = [x, y]$ .

**Step 2.** Define a map  $\theta: (E_K \times E_K)/K \rightarrow B_K$  by composing  $\phi$  with  $K_{(K \times K)} \rightarrow B_{(K \times K)} \simeq B_K \times B_K \rightarrow B_K$ , where the last map is projection onto the first factor. The fibre is  $F = \{[\bar{x}, \bar{y}] \mid [x] = [\bar{x}]\}$ , where  $[x]$  is fixed in  $B_K$ . Define maps  $\beta: E_K \rightarrow F$  and  $\gamma: F \rightarrow E_K$  by  $\beta(y) = [x, y]$  and  $\gamma([\bar{x}, \bar{y}]) = \bar{y} \cdot k$  where  $k$  is the unique element of  $K$  such that  $\bar{x} = x \cdot k$ . Notice that we are using the fact that  $K$  acts freely on  $E_K$ . We then see that  $F = E_K$  and, since  $\theta$  is a fibration,  $(E_K \times E_K)/K \simeq B_K$ . Note that a homotopy inverse to  $\theta$  is given by  $\sigma: B_K \rightarrow (E_K \times E_K)/K$ ,  $\sigma([x]) = [x, x]$ . Furthermore, note that the following triangle commutes (where  $\Delta$  is the diagonal,  $\Delta(z) = (z, z)$ ).

$$\begin{array}{ccc}
 B_K & \xrightarrow[\simeq]{\phi \circ \sigma} & K_{(K \times K)} \\
 & \searrow \Delta & \downarrow p \\
 & & B_K \times B_K
 \end{array}$$

since  $p\phi\sigma([x]) = p([x, x, e]) = [x, x] = ([x], [x])$ .

**Step 3.** Note that  $K_K$  consists of elements  $[x, k]$  with  $[x, k] = [\bar{x}, \bar{k}]$  if and only if there is  $h \in K$  such that  $x \cdot h = \bar{x}$  and  $hkh^{-1} = \bar{k}$ . Define  $\psi: K_K \rightarrow K_{(K \times K)}$  by  $\psi([x, y]) = [x, x, y]$ . Then the following square is a pullback (and a homotopy pullback since  $K_{(K \times K)} \rightarrow B_K \times B_K$  is a fibration).

$$\begin{array}{ccc}
 K_K & \xrightarrow{\psi} & K_{(K \times K)} \\
 q \downarrow & & \downarrow p \\
 B_K & \xrightarrow{\Delta} & B_K \times B_K
 \end{array}$$

Since it is a homotopy pullback, we can replace  $K_{(K \times K)} \rightarrow B_K \times B_K$  by the homotopy equivalent  $\Delta: B_K \rightarrow B_K \times B_K$  as shown in Step 2. We therefore obtain  $K_K$  as the homotopy pullback of  $\Delta$  over itself. But this is well-known (see [4, Theorem 5.11]); specifically, we have the following homotopy commutative diagram where the left square is a homotopy pullback (and the vertical maps are the usual

evaluations):

$$\begin{array}{ccccc}
 B_K^{S^1} & \longrightarrow & B_K^{[0,1]} & \xrightarrow{\simeq} & B_K \\
 \text{ev} \downarrow & & (\text{ev}_0, \text{ev}_1) \downarrow & \swarrow \Delta & \\
 B_K & \xrightarrow{\Delta} & B_K \times B_K & & 
 \end{array}$$

Thus, the free loop space  $B_K^{S^1}$  also arises as the homotopy pullback of  $\Delta$  over itself. Hence,  $B_K^{S^1} \simeq K_K$ .  $\square$

Note that the free loop space has played and continues to play important roles in both geometry and homotopy theory (see [4] for example). Finally, we have the identification of the gauge group of the universal bundle with the space of sections of the free loop fibration on  $B_K$ ,

$$G(\xi_u) = \Gamma(B_K^{S^1} \rightarrow B_K).$$

By Theorem 4.2, we then know the rational homotopy groups of this intriguing space of sections.

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