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The MAXIMUM ZERO-SUM PARTITION Problem

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Abstract. We study the MAXIMUM ZERO-SUM PARTITION problem (or MZSP), defined as follows: given a multiset $\mathcal{S} = \{a_1, a_2, \dots, a_n\}$ of integers $a_i \in \mathbb{Z}^*$ such that $\sum_{i=1}^n a_i = 0$, find a maximum cardinality partition $\{S_1, S_2, \dots, S_k\}$ of \mathcal{S} such that, for every $1 \leq i \leq k$, $\sum_{a_j \in S_i} a_j = 0$. Solving MZSP is useful in genomics for computing evolutionary distances between pairs of species. Our contributions are a series of algorithmic results concerning MZSP, in terms of complexity, (in)approximability, with a particular focus on the fixed-parameter tractability of MZSP with respect to either (i) the size k of the solution, (ii) the number of negative (resp. positive) values in \mathcal{S} and (iii) the largest integer in \mathcal{S} .

1 Introduction

In this paper, we study the MAXIMUM ZERO-SUM PARTITION (or MZSP).

MAXIMUM ZERO-SUM PARTITION (MZSP)

Instance : A multiset $\mathcal{S} = \{a_1, a_2, \dots, a_n\}$ of numbers $a_i \in \mathbb{Z}^*$ s.t. $\sum_{i=1}^n a_i = 0$.

Output : A maximum cardinality partition $\mathcal{S} = \{S_1, S_2, \dots, S_k\}$ of \mathcal{S} such that, for every $1 \leq i \leq k$, $\sum_{a_j \in S_i} a_j = 0$.

This problem emerged in bioinformatics, where determining the distance between two genomes was studied [1]. The distance formula in that context depends on a parameter to be optimized, which directly relates to answering MZSP. However, the MZSP problem in itself was not central to the results in [1], and thus has not been studied *per se* in that paper. Hence, the goal of the present paper is to extensively study the MZSP problem from an algorithmic point of view.

Definitions and Notations. For any integer n , $\llbracket 1, n \rrbracket$ denotes the set of integers from 1 to n . Given a (multi)set S of integers and an integer p , we say that S *sums to p* when the sum of the elements of S is equal to p . When $p = 0$, we say that S is a *zero-sum (multi)set*. For any instance \mathcal{S} of MZSP, we let **neg** (resp. **pos**) denote the number of negative (resp. positive) integers in \mathcal{S} and $m = \min\{\mathbf{neg}, \mathbf{pos}\}$. We denote by n^* the number of distinct values in \mathcal{S} , by $b = \sum_{i=1}^n \lceil \log_2(|a_i|) \rceil$ the

number of bits needed to encode \mathcal{S} (e.g. when \mathcal{S} is stored as a list, in which each element is binary encoded), and by $B = \max_{i \in \llbracket 1, n \rrbracket} \{|a_i|\}$. The cardinality of an optimal partition of \mathcal{S} , i.e. the size of the solution, is denoted by k . For example, if $\mathcal{S} = \{-7, -7, -7, -1, -1, -1, 2, 3, 3, 4, 4, 4, 4\}$, then $n = 13$, $\text{neg} = 6$, $\text{pos} = 7$, $m = 6$, $n^* = 5$, $B = 7$ and it can be seen that the optimal solution is $k = 4$: for instance, $S_1 = S_2 = \{-7, 4, 3\}$, $S_3 = \{-7, -1, 4, 4\}$ and $S_4 = \{-1, -1, 2\}$ form a solution. UNARY MZSP denotes MZSP for which unary encoding of the input instance is used. For any positive integer p , p -MZSP denotes the decision version of MZSP, in which, given p and a zero-sum integer multiset \mathcal{S} , we ask whether there exists a zero-sum partition S of \mathcal{S} such that $|S| \geq p$. We will also often use the O^* notation, as frequently done in parameterized complexity: for a given problem whose size of the input is n and parameter is k , $O^*(f(k))$ stands for $O(f(k) \cdot \text{poly}(n))$. In other words, O^* only describes the exponential part of the running time (in k) and discards the polynomial factor (in n).

First observations. Note that if we denote by $-\mathcal{S}$ the multiset \mathcal{S} to which all signs have been switched, then $-\mathcal{S}$ is a valid instance for MZSP, and both \mathcal{S} and $-\mathcal{S}$ have the same optimum k . Consequently, any result that applies to neg (resp. pos) applies to pos (resp. neg), and thus to m . Note also that an m -size zero-sum partition of \mathcal{S} is necessarily optimal, since at least one positive (resp. negative) element of \mathcal{S} needs to be present in any S_i from the partition. In other words, we always have $k \leq m$. For any given $p \in \mathbb{N}^*$, a YES-instance for p -MZSP is also a YES-instance for p' -MZSP as long as $p' \in \llbracket 1, p \rrbracket$. Indeed, merging any two sets in a size- p zero-sum partition of \mathcal{S} yields a size- $(p-1)$ zero-sum partition of \mathcal{S} . Finally, observe that if an integer a and its opposite $-a$ both belong to \mathcal{S} , then there always exists an optimal solution $S = \{S_1, S_2, \dots, S_k\}$ in which $S_i = \{-a, a\}$ for some $i \in \llbracket 1, n \rrbracket$. Indeed, suppose $-a$ and a both belong to \mathcal{S} , and observe an optimal solution $S = \{S_1, S_2, \dots, S_k\}$ in which $S_i \neq \{-a, a\}$ for every $i \in \llbracket 1, k \rrbracket$. Clearly, no S_i is such that $\{-a, a\} \subset S_i$, otherwise we could partition S_i into $\{-a, a\}$ and $S_i \setminus \{-a, a\}$, both summing to zero, contradicting the optimality of S . Thus $-a \in S_x$ and $a \in S_y$ for some $1 \leq x \neq y \leq k$. Now consider the following partition $S' = \{S'_1, S'_2, \dots, S'_k\}$ of \mathcal{S} : (i) $S'_i = S_i$ for every $i \in \llbracket 1, k \rrbracket$ such that $i \neq x$ and $i \neq y$, (ii) $S'_x = \{-a, a\}$ and (iii) $S'_y = (S_x \cup S_y) \setminus \{-a, a\}$. Every S'_i , $i \in \llbracket 1, k \rrbracket$, sums to zero, and $|S| = |S'| = k$.

In this paper, we study the MZSP problem under an algorithmic viewpoint, and, in particular, discuss its computational complexity, approximability and fixed-parameter tractability with respect to n , n^* , m , B and k (see Table 1).

2 Computational Complexity of MZSP

Theorem 1. *MZSP is strongly NP-complete, even if each S_i in the solution S contains at most four elements.*

Proof. The proof is by reduction from 3-PARTITION, which has been proved to be strongly NP-complete [3], and whose definition is as follows.

Parameter	Results
n	Strongly NP-complete (Thm 1) No $2^{o(n)}b^{O(1)}$ algorithm unless ETH fails (Thm 4) FPT (Thm 5) No approximation within ratio $O(n^{1-\epsilon})$ (Thm 7)
m	NP-complete, even if bounded (Thm 2)
k	NP-complete, even if bounded (Thm 2)
m	W[1]-hard (Thm. 8)
Unary encoded instance	XP(Cor. 2)
k	W[1]-hard (Cor. 1)
Unary encoded instance	XP(Thm 9)
n^*	No $2^{o(n^*)}b^{O(1)}$ algorithm unless ETH fails (Thm 10) XP(Thm 11)
B	FPT(Thm 13)
n^*+k	FPT(Thm 12)

Table 1. Summary of our main results, in relation to parameters n, m, k, n^*, B and b .

3-PARTITION

Instance : An integer C , a multiset $X = \{x_1, x_2, \dots, x_{3p}\}$ of integers such that (i) $\sum_{i=1}^{3p} x_i = C \cdot p$ and (ii) $\forall x_i \in X, \frac{C}{4} < x_i < \frac{C}{2}$.

Question : Does there exist a partition $\{X_1, X_2, \dots, X_p\}$ of X such that, for every $i \in \llbracket 1, p \rrbracket, \sum_{x_j \in X_i} x_j = C$?

Let $I = (C, X)$ be an instance of 3-PARTITION, and let \mathcal{S} be the multiset such that $\mathcal{S} = \{x_1, \dots, x_{3p}, -C, \dots, -C\}$, where $-C$ appears p times in \mathcal{S} . Note that, by definition of 3-PARTITION, the sum of all elements in \mathcal{S} is equal to zero, hence \mathcal{S} is an instance of MZSP. We now show that $I = (C, X)$ is a YES-instance for 3-PARTITION iff MZSP (with instance \mathcal{S}) has a solution of cardinality p .

(\Rightarrow) If I is a YES-instance for 3-PARTITION, there exists $t_j = (x_{i_{j,1}}, x_{i_{j,2}}, x_{i_{j,3}})$, $j \in \llbracket 1, p \rrbracket$, such that $x_{i_{j,1}} + x_{i_{j,2}} + x_{i_{j,3}} = C$. In particular, for every $j \in \llbracket 1, p \rrbracket$, $S_j = \{x_{i_{j,1}}, x_{i_{j,2}}, x_{i_{j,3}}, -C\}$ is a size- p partition of \mathcal{S} in which every S_j sums to zero. Moreover, such partition is optimal: since $\text{neg} = p$, no zero-sum partition of \mathcal{S} can contain strictly more than p sets.

(\Leftarrow) Suppose there exists a solution of MZSP of cardinality p , say $S = \{S_1, S_2, \dots, S_p\}$. Since any zero-sum subset in S contains at least one negative element, every $S_j, j \in \llbracket 1, p \rrbracket$, contains *exactly* one negative element, namely $-C$. Since, in 3-PARTITION, every x_i satisfies $\frac{C}{4} < x_i < \frac{C}{2}$, exactly 3 such elements are required to sum to C . Thus, any $S_j, j \in \llbracket 1, p \rrbracket$, contains 3 elements of the form x_i , together with $-C$. Since each S_j sums to zero, $\{x_1, \dots, x_{3p}\}$ can be partitioned in triplets, each summing to C , i.e. $I = (C, X)$ is a YES-instance for 3-PARTITION.

In unary, 3-PARTITION and MZSP are both encoded in $\Theta(p \cdot C)$ space. As 3-PARTITION is strongly NP-complete, MZSP is also strongly NP-complete. \square

As discussed above, finding a solution S to MZSP where every zero-sum set S_i in S satisfies $|S_i| = 2$ (if such a solution exists) is easy: look for two opposite values, combine them, and iterate. Theorem 1 proves that solving MZSP when every S_i contains 4 elements is (strongly) NP-complete, which rules out parameter “maximum size of an S_i ” for FPT considerations. Note that the case $|S_i| = 3$ (or equivalently $|S_i| \leq 3$) has been shown to be strongly NP-complete in [1].

Theorem 2. *MZSP is NP-complete, even when k and m are bounded.*

Proof. We show NP-completeness of MZSP in the specific case $m = k = 2$, by reduction from PARTITION which is known to be NP-complete [8].

PARTITION

Instance : A multiset $X = \{x_1, x_2, \dots, x_n\}$ of integers from \mathbb{N}^* .

Question : Does there exist a partition $\{X_1, X_2\}$ of X s.t. $\sum_{x_i \in X_1} x_i = \sum_{x_j \in X_2} x_j$?

Let X be an instance of PARTITION. We can always assume $\sum_{i=1}^n x_i$ to be even, otherwise we have a NO-instance. Thus assume $\sum_{i=1}^n x_i = 2N$. The MZSP instance we build from X is $\mathcal{S} = X \cup \{-N, -N\}$. We show that X is a YES-instance for PARTITION iff MZSP yields a size-2 zero-sum partition for \mathcal{S} .

(\Rightarrow) Suppose there exists a partition $\{X_1, X_2\}$ of X such that $\sum_{x_i \in X_1} x_i = \sum_{x_j \in X_2} x_j$. We thus have $\sum_{x_i \in X_1} x_i = \sum_{x_j \in X_2} x_j = N$, and $\{X_1 \cup \{-N\}, X_2 \cup \{-N\}\}$ is a zero-sum partition of \mathcal{S} . Moreover, this partition is optimal since $m = \text{neg} = 2$ and $k \leq m$.

(\Leftarrow) Suppose there exists a zero-sum partition of cardinality $k = 2$ of \mathcal{S} , say $\mathcal{S} = \{S_1, S_2\}$. Because $\text{neg} = 2$, we know that S_1 (resp. S_2) contains exactly one negative integer; thus, both in S_1 and S_2 , this integer is $-N$. Assume $S_1 = X_1 \cup \{-N\}$ and $S_2 = X_2 \cup \{-N\}$. In that case, $\{X_1, X_2\}$ is a partition of X , and because both S_1 and S_2 sum to zero, we have $\sum_{x_i \in X_1} x_i = \sum_{x_j \in X_2} x_j = N$. Thus X is a YES-instance for PARTITION. \square

Although we just showed that MZSP is strongly NP-complete in general, and remains NP-complete when k is bounded, we show there exists a pseudopolynomial algorithm that solves MZSP in the case $k = 2$.

Theorem 3. *2-MZSP can be solved in pseudopolynomial time.*

The following result gives two lower bounds on the time to solve MZSP, both based on the Exponential-Time Hypothesis (ETH, see e.g. [4] for a definition). Recall that b is the size of the input \mathcal{S} , assuming it is binary encoded.

Theorem 4. *Unless ETH fails, MZSP cannot be solved (i) in $2^{o(n)} \cdot b^{O(1)}$ or (ii) in $2^{o(\sqrt{b})}$.*

We now show that the above ETH bound based on n is essentially tight.

Theorem 5. *MZSP is solvable in $O^*(2^n)$.*

Proof. We solve MZSP by dynamic programming. Given an instance \mathcal{S} of MZSP, we create a dynamic programming 1-dimensional table T indexed by the subsets of \mathcal{S} . We set $T[\emptyset]$ to 0. Then, for increasing $i \in \llbracket 1, n \rrbracket$, and for every size- i subset P_i of \mathcal{S} , we fill $T[P_i]$ using the following rule:

$$T[P_i] = \begin{cases} \max_{a \in P_i} \{T[P_i \setminus \{a\}]\} & \text{if } P_i \text{ does not sum to } 0 \\ \max_{a \in P_i} \{T[P_i \setminus \{a\}]\} + 1 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

The optimal value k for MZSP is then found in $T[\mathcal{S}]$, and an optimal zero-sum partition of \mathcal{S} can be found by backtracking from that value. The space and time complexity of the above algorithm is $O^*(2^n)$, since it takes polynomial time to fill any of the 2^n elements in T . It remains to show correctness. For this, for any subset P of \mathcal{S} , we denote by k_P the cardinality of a maximum zero-sum subpartition of P , where the term *subpartition* describes a partition of a subset of P . Our goal is to show that for any P , $T[P] = k_P$. This is done by induction on $i = |P|$. When $i = 0$, this trivially holds as $T[\emptyset]$ is set to 0. Suppose now that for some $i \in \llbracket 0, n-1 \rrbracket$, any P such that $|P| = i$ satisfies $T[P] = k_P$. Let us now observe a set P of cardinality $i+1$. If P does not sum to zero, let us consider a maximum cardinality zero-sum subpartition of P , say (A_1, \dots, A_{k_P}) . Since P does not sum to zero, there exists $a \in P$ such that $a \notin \bigcup_{i=1}^{k_P} A_i$. Thus (A_1, \dots, A_{k_P}) is a maximum cardinality zero-sum subpartition of $P \setminus \{a\}$, otherwise this would contradict the cardinality maximality of (A_1, \dots, A_{k_P}) . Thus $k_{P \setminus \{a\}} = k_P$. Since $T[P \setminus \{a\}] = k_{P \setminus \{a\}}$, we have $T[P] \geq k_P$ by definition of $T[P]$. Conversely, if $a \in P$ and $(A_1, \dots, A_{k_{P \setminus \{a\}}})$ is a zero-sum subpartition of $P \setminus \{a\}$, then $(A_1, \dots, A_{k_{P \setminus \{a\}}})$ is a zero-sum subpartition of P . Thus $k_{P \setminus \{a\}} \leq k_P$, which means $T[P \setminus \{a\}] \leq k_P$ and thus implies $T[P] \leq k_P$. Altogether, we have $T[P] = k_P$. Now if P sums to zero, let (A_1, \dots, A_{k_P}) be a maximum cardinality zero-sum partition of P . We thus have $P = \bigcup_{j=1}^{k_P} A_j$. Let $a \in A_{k_P}$ (note that a exists, since A_{k_P} is non-empty). Thus (A_1, \dots, A_{k_P-1}) is a maximum zero-sum subpartition of $P \setminus \{a\}$, and hence $k_P = k_{P \setminus \{a\}} + 1$, which implies $T[P] \geq k_P$. Conversely, if $a \in P$, then $a \in A_j$ for a given $j \in \llbracket 1, k_P \rrbracket$. Using similar arguments as previously, we can prove that $k_P = k_{P \setminus \{a\}} + 1$, and thus $T[P] \leq k_P$. Altogether, we have $T[P] = k_P$. We conclude that $T[P] = k_P$ for any $P \subseteq \mathcal{S}$. In particular, $T[\mathcal{S}]$ contains a maximum cardinality zero-sum partition of \mathcal{S} . By backtracking in T , the sought partition can be found in polynomial time, which solves MZSP. \square

The previous theorem is based on the fact that the number of distinct subsets in \mathcal{S} is upper bounded by $O(2^n)$. It is also possible to upper bound this number by a function of b , the number of bits needed to binary encode \mathcal{S} .

Theorem 6. MZSP is solvable in $2^{O(\frac{b}{\log b})}$.

Proof. Let us partition \mathcal{S} into $S_p = \{a_i \in \mathcal{S} \text{ s.t. } |a_i| \leq \sqrt{b}\}$ and $S_q = \{a_i \in \mathcal{S} \text{ s.t. } |a_i| > \sqrt{b}\}$. Let us also denote, for any multiset E , by $\mathcal{P}(E)$ the set of subsets of E (e.g. $\mathcal{P}(\{2, 3, 3\}) = \{\emptyset, \{2\}, \{3\}, \{2, 3\}, \{3, 3\}, \{2, 3, 3\}\}$). In that case, we have $|\mathcal{P}(S_p)| \leq (b+1)^{2\sqrt{b}}$: indeed, by definition any element $a \in S_p$

satisfies $|a| \leq \sqrt{b}$. Moreover, a appears at most b times in S_p , since any a needs at least one bit to be encoded, while b bits are enough to encode \mathcal{S} . Thus S_p contains at most $2\sqrt{b}$ different numbers, each of them appearing at most b times in S_p . Hence $|\mathcal{P}(S_p)| \leq (b+1)^{2\sqrt{b}} \leq 2^{2\sqrt{b}\log(b+1)} \leq 2^{2\frac{b}{\log b}}$. On the other hand, S_q contains elements of size at least \sqrt{b} . Then S_q cannot be of cardinality greater than $2\frac{b}{\log b}$, otherwise encoding S_q would require more than b bits; thus $|\mathcal{P}(S_q)| \leq 2^{2\frac{b}{\log b}}$. Since S_p and S_q form a partition of \mathcal{S} , we have that $|\mathcal{P}(\mathcal{S})| = |\mathcal{P}(S_p)| \cdot |\mathcal{P}(S_q)| \leq 2^{4\frac{b}{\log b}}$. Since the dynamic programming algorithm from proof of Theorem 5 solves MZSP and has running time in $O^*(|\mathcal{P}(\mathcal{S})|)$, we conclude that MZSP can be solved in $2^{O(\frac{b}{\log b})}$, which proves the theorem. \square

We now end this section by turning our attention to the inapproximability of MZSP, in Theorem 7 below.

Theorem 7. *Unless $P=NP$, MZSP cannot be approximated within ratio $O(n^{1-\epsilon})$ for any $\epsilon > 0$.*

Proof. As for Theorem 2, we prove the result by reduction from PARTITION, which is known to be NP-complete [8]. Let $X = \{x_1, x_2, \dots, x_\ell\}$ be an instance of PARTITION, and let $\sum_{i=1}^{\ell} x_i = 2N$ with $N \geq 1$. We can indeed assume $\sum_{i=1}^{\ell} x_i$ to be non-zero and even, otherwise the problem is trivially answered. The reduction is as follows: let $q \geq 1$ be any integer, and let us recursively build a set $\{p_0, p_1, \dots, p_q\}$ of integers. More precisely, we set $p_0 = 1$, and $p_i = (2iN + 1)p_{i-1}$ for any $i \in \llbracket 1, q \rrbracket$. We note that for any $0 \leq j < i \leq q$, p_j divides p_i . Based on X and on the values p_0, p_1, \dots, p_q , we now construct the multiset $\mathcal{S} = \bigcup_{i=0}^q \{p_i X, -N p_i, -N \sum_{i=0}^q p_i\}$ where, for any $i \in \llbracket 0, q \rrbracket$, $p_i X$ denotes the values obtained by multiplying each element of X by p_i . It can be seen that \mathcal{S} sums to zero, and is thus a valid instance of MZSP. It can also be seen that the above reduction takes polynomial-time, as long as q remains polynomial in the input size of PARTITION. Intuitively, the above reduction consists in “copying”, a certain amount of times, an (expanded) instance X of PARTITION, so that the solution size of MZSP on \mathcal{S} increases, while maintaining the property that the different “expanded copies” of X in \mathcal{S} do not mutually interact.

Let us now prove correctness of our reduction, by showing the following: (i) X is a YES-instance for PARTITION iff (ii) MZSP for \mathcal{S} yields a partition of cardinality $q+2$ iff (iii) MZSP for \mathcal{S} yields a partition of cardinality 2.

$((i) \Rightarrow (ii))$ Suppose X is a YES-instance for PARTITION. Then there exists $P \subset X$ such that $\sum_{a \in P} a = N$. By construction, for every $i \in \llbracket 0, q \rrbracket$, $\sum_{a \in P} p_i a = N p_i$. Hence, for every negative number $-s$ in \mathcal{S} (s being either $-N p_i$ for some $i \in \llbracket 0, q \rrbracket$, or $-N \sum_{i=0}^q p_i$), it is possible to find a subset of \mathcal{S} summing to $N p_i$, and moreover any pair of such sets is mutually disjoint. Hence \mathcal{S} can be partitioned into zero-sum subsets, and the cardinality of such a partition is $q+2$.

$((ii) \Rightarrow (iii))$ If MZSP for \mathcal{S} yields a partition of cardinality $q+2$, and since $q+2 \geq 2$ then, by merging any $q+1$ sets in this partition, we obtain a size-2 zero-sum partition.

((iii) \Rightarrow (i)) Suppose there exists a zero-sum partition of MZSP for \mathcal{S} , of cardinality 2. In that case, there exists a non-empty zero-sum (multi)set $P \subset \mathcal{S}$ that does not contain the negative integer $-N \sum_{i=0}^q p_i$. Let us denote i_0 the smallest index $i \in \llbracket 0, q \rrbracket$ such that $-Np_i$ belongs to P . Note that for all $i \in \llbracket 0, i_0 - 1 \rrbracket$, we have $p_i X \cap P = \emptyset$: indeed, suppose by contradiction that this is not the case, and let A be the sum of the elements of $\left(\bigcup_{i=0}^{i_0-1} p_i X\right) \cap P$. Then we have $A \leq (1 + p_1 + \dots + p_{i_0-1}) \cdot 2N$, hence $A \leq i_0 \cdot 2N \cdot p_{i_0-1}$, which yields $A < p_{i_0}$. In particular, p_{i_0} does not divide A , since $A \neq 0$. As p_{i_0} divides every other element of P , we conclude that $A = 0$, which is the sought contradiction.

Now, let us consider $P' = P \bmod p_{i_0+1}$. From the above, the only elements from P that induce non zero elements in P' are the elements of $p_{i_0} X \cap P$, together with $-Np_{i_0}$. We thus conclude there exists a (multi)set $K \subset X$ such that $\sum_{a \in K} p_{i_0} a \equiv Np_{i_0} \pmod{p_{i_0+1}}$. Since $p_{i_0+1} > 2Np_{i_0}$, $\sum_{a \in K} p_{i_0} a = Np_{i_0}$, and thus $\sum_{a \in K} a = N$. In other words, we have a YES-instance for PARTITION.

Now we have proved correctness of our reduction, let us turn to proving our inapproximability result. Let ϵ be any strictly positive value, and suppose that there exists an approximation algorithm \mathcal{A} for MZSP, of ratio $\rho = O(n^{1-\epsilon})$ with $n = |\mathcal{S}|$. Take now an instance X of PARTITION, and recall that $\ell = |X|$. Let C be a constant such that $\rho \leq Cn^{1-\epsilon}$ for sufficiently large n . We let $q = \max(C^{\frac{1}{1-\epsilon}} - 1, (C^{\frac{1}{1-\epsilon}}(\ell+1) + 1)^{\frac{1}{\epsilon}-1} - 1)$, and we proceed with the above mentioned reduction by building the MZSP instance \mathcal{S} based on X and on parameter q . We have that $n = |\mathcal{S}| = (\ell + 1)(q + 1) + 1$.

Then, $\frac{q+1}{C^{\frac{1}{1-\epsilon}}} \geq 1$ and $(q+1)^{\frac{1}{1-\epsilon}-1} - C^{\frac{1}{1-\epsilon}}(\ell+1) \geq 1$ which yields $\frac{q+1}{C^{\frac{1}{1-\epsilon}}} \cdot ((q+1)^{\frac{1}{1-\epsilon}-1} - C^{\frac{1}{1-\epsilon}}(\ell+1)) \geq 1$ and $C((\ell+1)(q+1)+1)^{1-\epsilon} \leq q+1$. We thus conclude that $Cn^{1-\epsilon} \leq q+1$. We now apply \mathcal{A} on \mathcal{S} , and solve it polynomially within factor $\rho \leq Cn^{1-\epsilon}$. Thus we obtain $\rho \leq q+1$, hence $\rho < q+2$. However, we know from the above that if we have a YES-instance for PARTITION, then there exists a zero-sum partition of \mathcal{S} of cardinality $q+2$. In that case, the solution provided by the approximation algorithm \mathcal{A} is a zero-sum partition of \mathcal{S} of cardinality $c \geq \frac{q+2}{\rho} > 1$. Conversely, if \mathcal{A} provides a zero-sum partition of cardinality $c > 1$, then such zero-sum partition shows that X is a YES-instance for PARTITION.

Altogether, if there exists an approximation algorithm \mathcal{A} for MZSP of ratio $\rho = O(n^{1-\epsilon})$, it is possible to polynomially solve PARTITION: a contradiction, unless P=NP, to the fact that PARTITION is NP-complete [8]. \square

3 Parameterized Complexity of MZSP

Parameters k and m . We first consider fixed-parameterized complexity of MZSP with respect to the size k of the solution. On the way, we will also discuss parameter $m = \min\{\text{neg}, \text{pos}\}$, as we always have $m \geq k$. By Theorem 2, we know that, unless P=NP, MZSP is not FPT with respect to parameter k (resp. m), since MZSP is NP-complete even in the case where both these values are constant. The following theorem and corollary show W[1]-hardness of UNARY MZSP with respect to the same parameters.

Theorem 8. UNARY MZSP parameterized by m is $W[1]$ -hard.

Theorem 8 implies the following corollary, as we always have $m \geq k$.

Corollary 1. UNARY MZSP parameterized by k is $W[1]$ -hard.

Proof. (of Theorem 8) Let us assume that integers are encoded in unary. We reduce from UNARY BIN-PACKING, which is known to be $W[1]$ -hard with respect to parameter “size of the solution” [6], to UNARY MZSP. We first recall the definition of BIN-PACKING (presented here in its decision version):

BIN-PACKING

Instance : a multiset of strictly positive integers $P = \{w_1, \dots, w_n\}$, an integer W , an integer t .

Question : Does there exist a partition $\{J_1, \dots, J_t\}$ of P such that $\sum_{w_j \in J_i} w_j \leq W$ for every $i \in \llbracket 1, t \rrbracket$?

As mentioned above, UNARY BIN-PACKING is BIN-PACKING in which all integers are assumed to be encoded in unary; besides, UNARY BIN-PACKING, parameterized by the number t of bins, is known to be $W[1]$ -hard [6]. Let $I = (P, W, t)$ be an instance of UNARY BIN-PACKING. Moreover, assume $\sum_{i=1}^n w_i = tW$, since UNARY BIN-PACKING remains $W[1]$ -hard parameterized by the number t of bins under this condition [6]. Let us now construct the following instance of MZSP: $\mathcal{S} = \{w_1, \dots, w_n, \underbrace{-W, \dots, -W}_t\}$. Note that we have $m = t$. We now show that

MZSP admits a t -size zero-sum partition iff $I = (P, W, t)$ is a YES-instance for UNARY BIN-PACKING.

(\Rightarrow) Suppose (P, W, t) is a YES-instance for UNARY BIN-PACKING. Thus there exists a partition $\{J_1, \dots, J_t\}$ of P such that $\sum_{w_j \in J_i} w_j \leq W$ for every $i \in \llbracket 1, t \rrbracket$. However, since we assume $\sum_{i=1}^n w_i = tW$, we conclude that every J_i , $i \in \llbracket 1, t \rrbracket$, is such that $\sum_{w_j \in J_i} w_j = W$. Hence, $\{A_1, A_2, \dots, A_t\}$, where $A_i = J_i \cup \{-W\}$ for every $i \in \llbracket 1, t \rrbracket$, is a t -size zero-sum partition of \mathcal{S} .

(\Leftarrow) Conversely, suppose there exists a t -size zero-sum partition $\{A_1, A_2, \dots, A_t\}$ of \mathcal{S} . Since \mathcal{S} contains exactly t negative numbers, this implies that every A_i , $i \in \llbracket 1, t \rrbracket$, contains exactly one occurrence of $-W$. Thus $\{J_1, J_2, \dots, J_t\}$, where $J_i = A_i \setminus \{-W\}$ for every $i \in \llbracket 1, t \rrbracket$, is a partition of P . Moreover, since each A_i sums to zero, we know that each J_i sums to W , which ensures that (P, W, t) is a YES-instance for UNARY BIN-PACKING.

The above reduction is a valid parameterized reduction, since parameter t for UNARY BIN-PACKING is strictly equal to parameter m for UNARY MZSP. Moreover, the instance \mathcal{S} of UNARY MZSP that we built satisfies $k = m$. \square

Theorem 8 suggests that, even encoded in unary, MZSP admits no FPT algorithm parameterized by k . What we can show, in the following theorem, is that MZSP encoded in unary is in XP when parameterized by k .

Theorem 9. UNARY MZSP is in XP parameterized by k .

Since we always have $m \geq k$, Theorem 9 implies the following corollary.

Corollary 2. UNARY MZSP is in XP when parameterized by m .

Parameter number of distinct values n^ .* We now discuss parameter n^* , for which we first provide a complexity lower bound based on ETH. Recall that b is the (binary encoded) size of the input instance \mathcal{S} .

Theorem 10. *Unless ETH fails, MZSP cannot be solved in $2^{o(n^*)}b^{O(1)}$.*

Proof. The proof is based on a combination of (i) a reduction from 3-SAT to SUBSET-SUM presented in [7] and inspired from [10] and (ii) the reduction from SUBSET-SUM to MZSP from proof of Theorem 4. More precisely, starting from any instance of 3-SAT with n variables and m clauses, an instance of SUBSET-SUM containing $n' = 2n + 2m$ integers, among which $2n + m$ are pairwise distinct, is constructed. Moreover, in proof of Theorem 4, the instance \mathcal{S} of MZSP built from SUBSET-SUM contains $n'' = n' + 2 = 2n + 2m + 2$ integers, among which $n^* = 2n + m + 2$ are pairwise distinct. Under ETH, 3-SAT cannot be solved in $2^{o(n)}$. If we combine this information with the sparsification method [5] (which allows to consider only 3-SAT instances for which $m = O(n)$) and the above argument, we conclude that, under ETH, MZSP cannot be solved in $2^{o(n^*)}b^{O(1)}$. \square

Concerning parameterized complexity with respect to n^* , we suspect MZSP to be W[1]-hard parameterized by n^* , but the question remains open. Meanwhile, we are able to prove (see Theorem 11) that the problem is in XP with respect to n^* . The rationale for this result is that the multisets that constitute any maximum zero-sum partition of \mathcal{S} are few, and that we can efficiently compute them. In order to prove Theorem 11, we need to introduce several definitions, and first prove two propositions (Propositions 1 and 2).

Let us suppose that \mathcal{S} is a multiset containing n^* distinct values, denoted a_1, \dots, a_{n^*} . We introduce several notions: given any multiset \mathcal{M} built from a_1, \dots, a_{n^*} , we call *multiplicity multiset* of \mathcal{M} the multiset $\{u_1, u_2, \dots, u_{n^*}\}$ representing the multiplicities of each a_i in \mathcal{M} : more precisely, for any $i \in \llbracket 1, n^* \rrbracket$, $u_i \in \mathbb{N}$ is the number of times a_i appears in \mathcal{M} . With this notation, we can define a partial order \leq on multiplicity multisets as follows: let $u = \{u_1, u_2, \dots, u_{n^*}\}$ and $v = \{v_1, v_2, \dots, v_{n^*}\}$ be two multiplicity multisets; we write $u \leq v$ whenever $u_i \leq v_i$ for every $i \in \llbracket 1, n^* \rrbracket$. Now let $s = \{s_1, s_2, \dots, s_{n^*}\}$ be the multiplicity multiset of \mathcal{S} . We first define two sets, respectively named K and D : K is the set of irreducible multiplicity multisets of \mathcal{S} leading to zero-sum subsets of \mathcal{S} , and D is the set of all zero-sum subsets of \mathcal{S} . In the following, for simplicity we write $u = 0$ for any vector u whenever all its coordinates are equal to 0. Formally, K and D are defined as follows:

$$K = \left\{ u \in \mathbb{N}^{n^*} \mid \sum_{i=1}^{n^*} u_i a_i = 0, u \neq 0 \text{ and} \right. \\ \left. \forall v \in \mathbb{N}^{n^*}, v \leq u \text{ and } \sum_{i=1}^{n^*} v_i a_i = 0 \Rightarrow v = 0 \text{ or } v = u \right\} \text{ and}$$

$$D = \left\{ u \in \mathbb{N}^{n^*} \mid u \leq s, u \neq 0 \text{ and } \sum_{i=1}^{n^*} u_i a_i = 0 \right\}.$$

Any maximum zero-sum partition of \mathcal{S} is induced by elements of $K \cap D$ only. We define a third set Z as follows: $Z = \left\{ u \in \mathbb{N}^{n^*} \mid u \neq 0 \text{ and } \sum_{i=1}^{n^*} u_i a_i = 0 \right\}$. Note that both K and D are included in Z . We are now interested in two properties, related to the above definitions. We begin with Proposition 1.

Algorithm 1 XP algorithm for solving MZSP, parameterized by n^*

```

1: Compute  $D$ 
2: Initialize  $T$ 
3: for every  $i \in \llbracket 1, n \rrbracket$  do
4:   for every  $u \in D$  do
5:     for every  $v \in D$  do
6:       if  $v + u \in D$  then
7:          $T[v + u] = \max(T[v] + 1, T[v + u])$ 
8:       end if
9:     end for
10:  end for
11: end for
12: return  $T[s]$ 

```

Proposition 1. *Let U be a subset of Z such that $K \cap D \subseteq U$. There exists a size- p zero-sum partition of S iff there exists $\ell \geq p$ elements of U , say u^1, u^2, \dots, u^ℓ such that $\sum_{i=1}^{\ell} u^i = s$.*

For solving p -MZSP, it thus suffices to compute $K \cap D$, and to test whether it is possible to reach s , using p or more elements of $K \cap D$. Before that, we discuss the maximum cardinalities of K and D (see Proposition 2), which will be useful to evaluate the time complexity to generate these sets.

Proposition 2. $D \subseteq \llbracket 0, n \rrbracket^{n^*}$ and $K \subseteq \llbracket 0, n^*B - 1 \rrbracket^{n^*}$.

In order to compute D (resp. K), it thus suffices to generate each element of $\llbracket 0, n \rrbracket^{n^*}$ (resp. $\llbracket 0, n^*B - 1 \rrbracket^{n^*}$), and check for each of them whether it belongs to D (resp. K). For each element of $\llbracket 0, n \rrbracket^{n^*}$, checking its membership to D can be achieved in $O(n^2 \log B)$, thus D can be computed in $O(n^{n^*+2} \log(B))$. Concerning K , testing if an element of $\llbracket 0, n^*B - 1 \rrbracket^{n^*}$ sums to zero can be done in $O(n^* \log(n^*B))$, and by dynamic programming, we can check if it is irreducible in $O((n^*B)^{n^*})$; thus K can be computed in $O((n^*B)^{2n^*})$.

The set K (and its computation) will be useful later for proving Theorem 13. In the following, we first focus on set D , whose cardinality is denoted c_D . Indeed, starting from D , Algorithm 1 shows that MZSP can be solved in $O(nc_D^2 n^* \log n + n^{n^*+2} \log B)$. Since, by Proposition 2 above, c_D is in $O(n^{n^*})$, this shows that MZSP is XP relatively to parameter n^* , as stated by the following theorem.

Theorem 11. *MZSP is in XP when parameterized by n^* .*

Proof. We provide an algorithm that runs in time $O(nc_D^2 n^* \log n + n^{n^*+2} \log B)$. The proof derives from Algorithm 1, in which T is an array indexed by the elements of D and which is initialized as follows: $T[0] = 0$, and for every other vector $v \in D$, $T[v] = -\infty$. We also recall that s is the multiplicity multiset of S .

Clearly, Algorithm 1 runs in $O(nc_D^2 n^* \log n)$ where $c_D = |D|$, since nc_D^2 additions on vectors are realized, each taking $O(n^* \log n)$ time. To this complexity, $O(n^{n^*+2} \log B)$ should be added for the precomputation of D . We now show

that Algorithm 1 is correct. At the end of the algorithm, for any $v \in D$, $T[v]$ represents the largest number of elements of D that we can sum to obtain v . Let us denote w_v this value (thus $T[v] = w_v$). For any $i \in \llbracket 1, n \rrbracket$, let $\mathcal{P}(i)$ be the following property: for every $v \in D$, $T[v] = w_v$ if $w_v \in \llbracket 0, i \rrbracket$. Our goal is to prove, by induction on i , that $\mathcal{P}(i)$ holds for any $i \in \llbracket 1, n \rrbracket$. First, $\mathcal{P}(0)$ is true since $w_v = 0$ implies $v = 0$. Now let $i \geq 0$, and let us assume $\mathcal{P}(i)$ holds. Let $v \in D$. If $w_v \leq i$, then by induction hypothesis, we have $T[v] = w_v$. If not, then there exists $u \in D$ such that $w_{v-u} = i$, and hence $T[v-u] = i$. Hence, by construction of T , $T[v] = i + 1 = w_v$, which consequently proves that $\mathcal{P}(i+1)$ holds. By induction, $\mathcal{P}(i)$ holds for any $i \in \llbracket 1, n \rrbracket$. In particular, $T[s]$ represents the largest number of elements from D that can be summed in order to obtain s . By Proposition 1, there exists ℓ elements of D whose sum is s iff there exists a zero-sum partition of \mathcal{S} , of cardinality ℓ . Thus the cardinality of a maximum zero-sum partition of \mathcal{S} is $T[s]$, which shows correctness of Algorithm 1. \square

As mentioned before, we conjecture MZSP to be W[1]-hard parameterized by n^* . In contrast, we have the following result.

Theorem 12. *MZSP is FPT when parameterized by $n^* + k$.*

Parameter maximum absolute value B . Recall that B is the greatest integer (in absolute value) in an instance \mathcal{S} of MZSP.

Theorem 13. *MZSP is FPT when parameterized by B .*

Proof. In order to prove the result, we will provide an ILP model for our problem. We will then show that the number of variables of our ILP is a function of n^* and B only, which, combined with the fact that ILP is FPT parameterized by its number of variables [2, 9] and the fact that $n^* \leq 2B$, allows us to conclude. Given an integer k , we are interested in solving k -MZSP, which asks whether a size- k zero-sum partition of \mathcal{S} exists. Let (\mathcal{S}, k) be an instance of k -MZSP. Let us number the n^* distinct values in \mathcal{S} a_1, \dots, a_{n^*} and let s_1, \dots, s_{n^*} be their respective multiplicities in \mathcal{S} . Let $c_K = |K|$, where K is the set defined previously, and let us compute K – recall that c_K , by Proposition 2 and the discussion that follows, satisfies $c_K = O((n^*B)^{n^*})$, and that K can be computed in $O((n^*B)^{2n^*})$. Our ILP based on the following c_K variables x_u , $u \in K$, where x_u represents the number of times element u appears in a zero-sum partition of \mathcal{S} of cardinality at least k . The ILP formulation of the problem is as follows.

<p>k-MZSP (ILP model):</p> <div style="text-align: center; margin-top: 10px;"> <p>c.1 $\forall u \in K \quad x_u \geq 0$</p> <p>c.2 $\forall i \in \llbracket 1, n^* \rrbracket \quad \sum_{u \in K} u_i x_u = s_i$</p> <p>c.3 $\sum_{u \in K} x_u \geq k$</p> </div>
--

We now show correctness of our ILP model, by proving that there exists a zero-sum partition of MZSP of cardinality k iff the above ILP formulation admits a solution.

(\Rightarrow) Suppose \mathcal{S} admits a size- k zero-sum partition. Then, by Proposition 1, we know there exist $\ell \leq k$ elements of K which sum to s , that we will call u^1, \dots, u^ℓ . For $u \in K$, let x_u denote the number of times u appears in (u_1, \dots, u_ℓ) . Then, by definition, $\forall u \in K, x_u \geq 0$, $\sum_{u \in K} x_u u = s$ and $\sum_{u \in K} x_u = \ell \geq k$. Thus our ILP formulation admits a solution.

(\Leftarrow) Conversely, suppose there exists x_u for $u \in K$, which is a solution to the above ILP formulation. Let us build $(u^i)_{i \in [1, \ell]}$, where element u appears exactly x_u times. Then, from C.2, $\sum_{i=1}^{\ell} u^i = s$. Moreover, from C.3, $\ell \geq k$. Thus, from Proposition 1, there exists a size- k zero-sum partition of \mathcal{S} .

Since $n^* \leq 2B$, and since ILP, parameterized by the number x of variables, is FPT and can be solved in $O^*(x^{2.5x+o(x)})$ [2, 9], and since here $x = c_K = O((n^*B)^{n^*})$, the result follows. \square

4 Conclusion

We provided diverse algorithmic results concerning the MZSP problem: hardness, (in)approximability and fixed-parameterized complexity considerations with respect to parameters n, m, k, n^* and B . Some questions about MZSP remain unanswered. In particular, we conjecture MZSP to be W[1]-hard parameterized by the number n^* of distinct values in \mathcal{S} ; (dis)proving it remains open.

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