Inverter Probing for Power Distribution Network Topology Processing

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Abstract—Knowing the connectivity and line parameters of the underlying electric distribution network is a prerequisite for solving any grid optimization task. Although distribution grids lack observability and comprehensive metering, inverters with advanced cyber capabilities currently interface solar panels and energy storage devices to the grid. Smart inverters have been widely used for grid control and optimization, yet the fresh idea here is to engage them towards network topology inference. Being an electric circuit, a distribution grid can be intentionally probed by instantaneously perturbing inverter injections. Collecting and processing the incurred voltage deviations across nodes can potentially unveil the grid topology even without knowing loads. Using grid probing data and under an approximate grid model, the tasks of topology recovery and line status verification are posed respectively as non-convex estimation and detection problems. Leveraging the features of the Laplacian matrix of a tree graph, probing terminal nodes is analytically shown to be sufficient for exact topology recovery. The related non-convex problems are surrogated to convex ones, which are iteratively solved via closed-form updates based on the alternating direction method of multipliers and projected gradient descent. Numerical tests on benchmark feeders demonstrate that grid probing can yield line status error probabilities of $10^{-3}$ by probing 40% of the nodes.

Index Terms—Power distribution networks; topology learning; smart inverters; linearized distribution flow model.

I. INTRODUCTION

To improve reliability, provide ancillary services, and avoid network violations, utilities need to control the power injections from solar resources, energy storage devices, and micro-generators. To perform any meaningful grid monitoring and optimization task though, a detailed model for the underlying grid topology is needed. Some utilities have limited information on their primary and/or secondary networks. Others may know their line infrastructure and impedances, but not which lines are currently energized — recall that grids are oftentimes reconfigured for maintenance, to balance loads or alleviate faults. Topology processing could be broadly classified into topology verification and topology identification. In topology verification, the operator knows the line infrastructure and would like to find the energized lines. Topology identification aims to recover the connectivity and line impedances, and is hence a more challenging task than verification.

In transmission networks, topology processing is usually handled through the generalized state estimator (GSE) [1] Sec. 4.10. Since the GSE does not carry over to distribution systems due to lack of observability, recent research efforts exploit second-order statistics of electric quantities to recover distribution grid topologies. Reference [2] collects voltage magnitudes from all nodes, and leverages the structure of their covariance matrix and its inverse to identify the grid topology. The previous scheme has been improved by waiving the assumption on identical resistance-to-reactance ratios across lines [3], and by further utilizing prior information on power injection covariances at terminal buses [4]. Topology identification has also been tackled using graphical models by fitting a spanning tree based on the mutual information of voltage data [5]. A Wiener filtering approach using wide-sense stationary processes on radial networks is reported in [6]. The aforementioned schemes rely on ensemble covariances and thus, reliable topology estimates can be obtained only after long observation intervals (e.g., hours). Given that a feeder typically undergoes 5-10 switching events on a daily basis [7], grid topologies may have changed during data collection.

To avoid delays, several works infer grid topologies using a single or a few data snapshots. Commencing with topology verification, the problem has been cast as a spanning tree identification task given load data at all nodes and power flow readings at selected lines [8]. Exploiting the fundamental cycles of the grid graph, flow meters are optimally placed under noiseless and noisy data setups. Given a finite number of voltage snapshots, topology verification is posed as maximum likelihood and maximum a-posteriori probability detection problems in [9]. In [10], deep neural network-based classifiers are able to detect line statuses; nevertheless, the standard PQ/PV power flow dataset used as input to the classifiers may not be available in distribution grids. Reference [11] recognizes that line impedances appear linearly in the power flow equations, and estimates them via a low rank-plus-sparse decomposition.

Different from the previous schemes, topology processing can be accomplished by actively rather than passively collecting grid data. For example, a microgrid topology can be inferred by transmitting power line communication signals and then measuring their reception time at different buses [13]. Reference [14] perturbs the primary droop parameters of micro-generators and acquires a least-square estimate of the bus admittance matrix through the grid response. Leveraging the communication, actuation, and sensing capabilities of smart inverters, our previous works [15] and [16] purposefully probe the grid by varying the (re)active power injections at selected buses, record the incurred voltage responses, and thus, infer the complex loads at non-actuated buses.

Building on the idea of active data collection, this work...
engages smart inverters to actuate the grid and learn network topologies upon collecting voltage deviations across nodes. Our contribution is on three fronts: First, we extend the idea of grid probing to the pertinent tasks of network topology identification and verification. Using non-synchronized data and under an approximate grid model, the two tasks are posed as non-convex data fits to estimate or detect the Laplacian matrix of a tree graph. Second, leveraging radial structures, we provide sufficient conditions on the placement of probing buses for successful topology recovery. It is shown that probing the candidate leaf nodes is sufficient. Third, we put forth convex relaxations of the original problems and devise efficient algorithms for solving them.

The rest of this work is organized as follows. Section II revisits graph theory preliminaries and an approximate grid model. Section III engages grid probing for topology identification, provides identifiability conditions, and solves the relaxed problem iteratively using closed-form updates based on the alternating direction method of multipliers (ADMM). Section IV poses topology verification as a binary detection problem under tree Laplacian matrix constraints, establishes verifiability, and solves the relaxed minimization via a projected gradient descent scheme. Our claims are corroborated using the IEEE 13- and 37-bus feeders in Section V. Conclusions and future directions are summarized in Section VI.

Regarding notation, lower- (upper-) case boldface letters denote column vectors (matrices). Calligraphic symbols are reserved for sets. Symbol $\top$ stands for transposition. Vectors 0 and 1 are the all-zero and all-one vectors, while $e_m$ is the $m$-th canonical vector. Symbol $\|x\|_2$ denotes the $\ell_2$-norm of x and $d_g(x)$ defines a diagonal matrix having $x$ on its diagonal. A symmetric positive (semi)definite (psd) matrix is denoted as $X \succ 0$ ($X \succeq 0$), while $|X|$ and $\text{Tr}(X)$ are the determinant and trace of $X$. The sets of symmetric and psd $N \times N$ matrices are denoted by $\mathbb{S}^N$ and $\mathbb{S}^N_{++}$, respectively.

II. MODELING PRELIMINARIES

Before presenting our probing scheme, this section reviews concepts from graph theory and an approximate grid model.

A. Preliminaries from graph theory

Let $G = (\mathcal{V}, \mathcal{E})$ be an undirected graph, where $\mathcal{V}$ is the set of nodes and $\mathcal{E}$ the set of edges $\mathcal{E} := \{(m, n) : m, n \in \mathcal{V}\}$. A rooted tree is a connected graph without loops with one node designated as the root and indexed by 0. In a tree graph, a path is the unique sequence of edges connecting two nodes. The set of nodes adjacent to the edges forming the path between nodes $n$ and $m$ will be denoted by $\mathcal{P}_{n,m}$. The nodes belonging to $A_m := \mathcal{P}_{0,m}$ are termed the ancestors of node $m$; see also Fig. 1. If $n \in A_m$, then $m$ is a descendant of node $n$. The descendants of node $m$ comprise the set $D_m$. By convention, $m \in A_m$ and $m \in D_m$. If $n \in A_m$ and $(m, n) \in \mathcal{E}$, node $n$ is the parent of $m$. A node without descendants is called a leaf. Leaf nodes are collected in the set $\mathcal{F}$, while non-leaf nodes will be termed internal nodes.

The depth $d_m$ of node $m$ is defined as the number of its ancestors, i.e., $d_m := |A_m|$. If $n \in A_m$ and $d_n = k$, node $n$ is the unique $k$-depth ancestor of node $m$ and will be denoted by $\alpha_m^k$ for $k = 0, \ldots, d_m$. Finally, the $k$-th level set of node $m$ is defined as

$$N^k_m := \begin{cases} D_{\alpha_m^k} \setminus D_{\alpha_m^{k+1}} & , \quad k = 0, \ldots, d_m - 1 \\ D_m \setminus D_{\alpha_m^d} & , \quad k = d_m. \end{cases}$$

Fig. 1. Node $m$ is a leaf node, while $m$ is an internal node of the left graph. The ancestor ($A_m$) and descendant ($D_m$) sets for node $m$ are also shown. The level set $N^0_m$ consists of $\alpha_m^0$ and the subtrees rooted at $\alpha_m^0$, excluding the subtree containing node $m$. The properties of Lemma 1 can be easily checked in the right graph.

The concept of the level set is illustrated in Figure 1. In essence, the level set $N^k_m$ consists of node $\alpha_m^k$ and all the subtrees rooted at $\alpha_m^k$ excluding the one containing node $m$. Level sets feature the ensuing properties that will be used later.

**Lemma 1.** Let $m$ be a node in a tree graph.

i) The node $\alpha_m^k$ is the only node in $N^k_m$ at depth $k$; the remaining nodes in $N^{k+1}_m$ are at larger depths;

ii) If $n \in N^k_m$, then $\alpha_m^k = \alpha_m^n$ and $\alpha_m^{k+1} \in N^k_m$;

iii) If $n, s \in N^k_m$, then $\alpha_m^n = \alpha_m^s = \alpha_m^s \in N^k_m$;

iv) if $m$ is a leaf node, then $N^d_m = \{\alpha_m^d\}$;

v) if $s \in D_n$ and $n \in N^k$, then $N^k_m = N^k_n$ for $k < d_m$; and

vi) if $d_m = k$, then $m \in N^k_m$ and $m \notin N^\ell_m$ for $\ell < k$.

The properties of Lemma 1 follow readily after observing that given a node $m$ and a depth $k \in \{0, \ldots, d_m\}$, the level set $N^k_m$ is a subset of $D_{\alpha_m^k}$. Representative examples of these properties are depicted in the grid of Figure 1 while their proofs are reported in the Appendix.

B. Power flow model

A radial single-phase power distribution grid having $N + 1$ buses can be modeled by a graph $G_o = (\mathcal{N}, \mathcal{L})$. The nodes in $\mathcal{N} := \{0, \ldots, N\}$ represent grid buses, and the edges in $\mathcal{L}$ distribution lines. The active (reactive) power injection at bus $n$ is denoted by $p_n$ ($q_n$), while $v_n$ is its voltage magnitude. The substation bus is indexed by $n = 0$ and its voltage is fixed at $v_0 = 1$. Power distribution networks are oftentimes operated in a radial structure, so that $G_o$ is a tree rooted at the substation. The voltage magnitudes and power injections at all buses excluding the substation are collected accordingly in vectors $v$, $p$, and $q$.

Let $r + jx$ be the impedance of line $\ell$, and collect all the impedances in vector $r + jx$. The grid connectivity is captured by the branch-bus incidence matrix $\mathbf{A} \in \{0, \pm 1\}^{L \times (N + 1)}$ that can be partitioned into its first and the rest of its columns as
A = [a_0 \ A]. For a radial grid, the reduced incidence matrix A is square and invertible [17]. Since \( A1 = 0 \), it follows that
\[
a_0 = -A1. \tag{2}
\]

Although power injections are non-linearly related to nodal voltage phasors, upon linearizing complex power injections around the flat voltage profile \( 1 + j0 \), the bus voltage magnitudes can be approximated by \( \nu = R_o p + X_o q + 1 \) \( \tag{3} \) where \( R_o^{-1} := A^T d g^{-1}(r)A \) and \( X_o^{-1} := A^T d g^{-1}(x)A \). A key property of \( R_o \) is that its \((m, n)\)-th entry equals the sum of the line resistances between the nodes in \( A_m \cap A_n \) \( \tag{4} \)
\[
[R_o]_{mn} = \sum_{\ell = (c, d) \in \mathcal{L}} r_{\ell}. \]

Three useful properties of \( R_o \) are presented next and proved in the Appendix.

**Lemma 2.** If \( m, n, \) and \( s \) are nodes in a grid represented by a tree graph, then
i) two nodes \( n \) and \( s \) belong to \( N^k_m \) for some \( k \) if and only if \( [R_o]_{mn} = [R_o]_{ms} \); and
ii) if \( n \in N^k_m \) and \( s \in N^{k+1}_m \), then \( [R_o]_{ms} = [R_o]_{mn} + r_{(a_{km}, a_{km+1})} \);
iii) if \( m \) is a leaf node, then \( [R_o]_{mn} > [R_o]_{mn}, \forall n \neq m; \)

### III. GRID PROBING FOR TOPOLOGY IDENTIFICATION

Different from existing topology processing schemes relying on passively collected smart meter data, an active data acquisition protocol is put forth here. The idea is to leverage the communication, actuation, and sensing functionalities of smart inverters interfacing solar and energy storage units. An inverter can be commanded to shed solar generation, (dis)-charge a battery, or change its power factor within milliseconds. This enables a new data collection paradigm, where the system operator purposefully probes the electric grid by changing inverter power injections and measuring the electric circuit response to possibly identify the feeder topology.

Let us first model the data collected via probing. The buses hosting controllable inverters are collected in the set \( C \subseteq N \) with \( C := |C| \). Consider the probing action at time \( t \). Each bus \( m \in C \) perturbs its active injection by \( \tilde{p}_m(t) \) and all inverter perturbations \( \{\tilde{p}_m(t)\}_{m \in C} \) are stacked in \( \tilde{p}(t) \). The incurred perturbation in voltage magnitudes \( \tilde{v}(t) := v(t) - v(t - 1) \) can be expressed from \( \tilde{p}(t) \) as
\[
\tilde{v}(t) = R_o \delta(t) + e(t). \tag{5}
\]

The probing vector can be expressed as \( \delta(t) = I_c \tilde{p}(t) \), where matrix \( I_c \in \mathbb{R}^{N \times |C|} \) collects the canonical vectors associated with the buses in \( C \). The error vector \( e(t) \) on the other hand captures measurement noise, the modeling error introduced by the LDF approximation, and voltage deviations attributed to possible load variations during probing.

The grid is perturbed over \( T \) probing periods. Collecting the probing actions \( \{\delta(t)\}_{t=1}^T \), the measured voltage deviations \( \{\tilde{v}(t)\}_{t=1}^T \), and the error terms \( \{e(t)\}_{t=1}^T \) as columns of matrices \( \Delta, \tilde{V}, \) and \( E \) accordingly, yields
\[
\tilde{V} = R_o I_c \Delta + E. \tag{6}
\]

The matrix \( \Delta \) can be designed to be full row-rank. This can be achieved for example if a single probing bus \( m \in C \) is probed at each probing action, and each probing bus is probed at least once over the \( T \) actions, thus implying \( T \geq C \). Although \( \Delta \) and our subsequent developments consider perturbing solely active power injections yielding rise to purely active probing, our results can be extended to reactive probing or combinations thereof.

### A. Problem formulation

Topology identification can be now posed as the task of recovering \( R_o \) given \( (\tilde{V}, \Delta) \) using the data model of \( \tilde{V} = R_o I_c \Delta + E \). Interpreting power perturbations and voltages respectively as the inputs and outputs of system, topology processing can be posed as a system identification problem. This is a major advantage over the existing blind identification schemes that rely on first-order statistics of voltages (outputs) \[2, 3\]. Beyond requiring fewer data and shortening the acquisition time, the new method waives restricting statistical assumptions, such as that power injections are uncorrelated across nodes \[3, 19\], or independent across time \[2, 5\]. Moreover, different from other system identification-based approaches \[11, 12\], only perturbations on power injections at probed buses are required.

Rather than casting the topology identification as a general linear system identification task, one could further exploit the properties of \( R_o \). From the definition of \( R_o \) in \[3\], its inverse
\[
\Theta_o := \frac{1}{\Delta} = A^T d g^{-1}(r)A \tag{7}
\]

is a reduced weighted Laplacian for the underlying graph \( G_o \) with weights equal to the inverse line resistances.

The grid topology is equivalently captured by the non-reduced Laplacian matrix \( \Theta_o := \Delta^{-1} d g^{-1}(r)A \). To see this, note that the two matrices are related through the linear mapping \( \Phi : S^N \to S^{N+1} \) as \[cf. \[3\] \]
\[
\Theta_o = \Phi(\Theta_o) := \begin{bmatrix} 1 \Theta_o & 1 & -1^T \Theta_o \\ -1^T \Theta_o & 0 & \Theta_o \end{bmatrix}. \tag{8}
\]

As a consequence, finding \( \Theta_o \) is equivalent to finding \( \Theta_o \). Because the entry \( \Theta_o(m,n) \) equals \( -r_{(m,n)}^{-1} \) if nodes \( m \) and \( n \) are directly connected, and zero otherwise, we aim at estimating \( \Theta_o \) to unveil the grid topology and estimate line resistances. Line reactances can be similarly found via reactive probing.

We will next see how the properties of \( \Theta_o \) translate to \( \Theta_o \).

Being the Laplacian of a connected graph, matrix \( \Theta_o \) is known to be symmetric positive psd (\( \Theta_o \succeq 0 \)) having zero as a simple eigenvalue and \( 1 \) as the related eigenvector \[20\]
\[
\Theta_o 1 = 0. \tag{9}
\]

Matrix \( \Theta_o \) is symmetric strictly positive definite (\( \Theta_o \succ 0 \)), due to \[7\] and the fact that \( A \) is non-singular \[21\]. The sign information on the off-diagonal entries of \( \Theta_o \) carries over to \( \Theta_o \). From \[8, 9\] and because the first column of \( \Theta_o \) has non-positive off-diagonal entries, it also follows that \( \Theta_o 1 \geq 0 \).
The grid operator may know that two specific buses are definitely connected, e.g., through flow sensors or line status indicators. To model know line statuses, let us introduce matrix \( \Gamma \in \mathcal{S}^{N+1} \) with \( \Gamma_{mn} = 0 \) if line \((m,n)\) is known to be non-energized; and \( \Gamma_{mn} = 1 \) if there is no prior information for line \((m,n)\). If there is no information for any line, then apparently \( \Gamma = 11^\top \). Based on \( \Gamma \), define the set
\[
S(\Gamma) := \left\{ \Theta : \begin{array}{l}
\Theta_{mn} \leq 0, \text{ if } \Gamma_{mn} = 1 \\
\Theta_{mn} = 0, \text{ if } \Gamma_{mn} = 0
\end{array} \right\}.
\]
The set \( S(\Gamma) \) ignores possible prior information on lines fed directly by the substation. This information is encoded on the zero-th column of \( \Gamma \). In particular, if \( \Gamma_{0n} = 1 \), then \( \Theta_{0n} \leq 0 \) and \( \sum_{m=1}^{N} \Theta_{mn} \geq 0 \). Otherwise, it holds that \( \Theta_{0n} = \sum_{m=1}^{N} \Theta_{mn} = 0 \). The two properties related to lines directly connected to the substation are captured by the set
\[
S_0(\Gamma) := \left\{ \Theta : \begin{array}{l}
\Theta_{m0}\Theta_{01} \geq 0, \text{ if } \Gamma_{m0} = 1 \\
\Theta_{m0}\Theta_{01} = 0, \text{ if } \Gamma_{m0} = 0
\end{array} \right\}.
\]

Summarizing, the set of admissible reduced Laplacian matrices for arbitrary graphs with prior edge information \( \Gamma \) is
\[
\mathcal{M} := \left\{ \Theta : \Theta \in S(\Gamma) \cap S_0(\Gamma), \Theta = \Theta^\top \right\}. \tag{10}
\]
The set \( \mathcal{M} \) is obviously convex. By invoking the Gershgorin’s disc theorem, it can be shown that \( \Theta \geq 0 \) for all \( \Theta \in \mathcal{M} \), that is \( \mathcal{M} \subseteq \mathcal{S}^+ \). The reduced Laplacian matrices included in \( \mathcal{M} \) correspond to possibly meshed and/or disconnected graphs.

Enforcing two additional properties on \( \Theta \) can render it a proper reduced Laplacian of a tree network. First, the Laplacian matrix in its non-reduced form \( \Phi(\Theta) \) should have exactly \( 2N \) non-zero off-diagonal entries related to the \( N \) edges of a tree with \( N + 1 \) nodes. Second, the reduced Laplacian \( \Theta \) should be strictly positive definite since the network is connected. These two properties are modeled as
\[
\mathcal{T} := \left\{ \Theta : \Phi(\Theta) \right\} \geq 0, (11)
\]
where \( \|X\|_{0,\text{off}} \) counts the number of non-zero off-diagonal entries of matrix \( X \). The set \( \mathcal{T} \) encodes the information that tree networks have the sparest \( \Phi(\Theta) \)’s associated with non-singular \( \Theta \)’s. Unfortunately, the set \( \mathcal{T} \) is non-convex and open.

Let us now return to the task of topology recovery using the model in (3). An estimate \( \hat{\Theta} \) of \( \Theta_o \) could be obtained via a (weighted) least-square (LS) fit of the probing data under the just mentioned Laplacian constraints, that is
\[
\min_{\Theta \in \mathcal{M} \cap \mathcal{T}} \left\{ \frac{1}{2} \| \Theta \Phi(\Theta) - I_C \Delta \|_{F}^2 \right\}. \tag{12}
\]

The matrix norm \( \|X\|_{F} \) is defined for a weighting matrix \( W \succ 0 \) as \( \|X\|_{F}^2 := tr(X^\top WX) = \|W^{1/2}X\|_{F}^2 \) with \( \|X\|_{F} \) being the Frobenius norm of \( X \).

Setting \( W = I_N \) is the simplest option for the weighting matrix. If additional information on the probing data is available, other options can be used. For example, if the error term in (5) is primarily attributed to load variations \( \hat{p}_L(t) := p_L(t) - p_L(t-1) \) and \( \hat{q}_L(t) := q_L(t) - q_L(t-1) \), where \( p_L \) and \( q_L \) represent the active and reactive power absorbed by loads, the error term can be approximated as
\[
e(t) \simeq R_o \hat{p}_L(t) + X_o \hat{q}_L(t).
\]

If we further assume that \( X_o = \gamma R_o \) for a complex scalar \( \gamma \) as in (9), the error term becomes
\[
e(t) \simeq R_o[p_L(t) + \gamma q_L(t)]. \tag{13}
\]
The latter assumption can be justified because the reactance-to-resistance ratios \( x_L/r_L \) do not vary significantly across distribution lines; see e.g., [9, Table I]. Approximating these ratios as \( x_L/r_L = \gamma \) for all \( l \in E \) provides \( X_o \simeq \gamma R_o \).

Plugging (13) into (5) and premultiplying by \( \Theta_o = R_o^{-1} \) yields the data model
\[
\Theta_o \hat{V}(t) = \delta(t) + [\hat{p}_L(t) + \gamma \hat{q}_L(t)]. \tag{14}
\]
Postulating that load variations are zero-mean with known covariance matrices \( \Sigma_p := \mathbb{E}[\hat{p}_L(t)\hat{p}_L(t)^\top] \), \( \Sigma_q := \mathbb{E}[\hat{q}_L(t)\hat{q}_L(t)^\top] \), and \( \Sigma_{pq} := \mathbb{E}[\hat{p}_L(t)\hat{q}_L(t)] \); the error term in the right-hand-side (RHS) of (14) becomes zero-mean with covariance matrix
\[
\Sigma := \Sigma_p + \gamma^2 \Sigma_q + \gamma (\Sigma_{pq} + \Sigma_{pq}^\top). \tag{15}
\]
Then, the minimizer of (12) with \( W = \Sigma^{-1} \) becomes the best linear unbiased estimator (BLUE) of \( \Theta_o \) [22, Th. 6.1]. If load variations are Gaussian, the minimizer of (12) is the maximum likelihood estimate (MLE) of \( \Theta_o \).

**B. Identifiability analysis**

This section discusses whether the actual topology can be uniquely recovered via the probing buses \( C \). As customary in identifiability analysis, the probing data in (3) are considered noiseless (\( E = 0 \)). Some intermediate claims proved in the appendix precede our main result. Lemma 3 (depicted in Fig. 2 and Corollary 1) relate ancestor nodes to level sets.

**Lemma 3.** In a tree graph, the node \( n \) is the k-depth ancestor of a leaf node \( m \in F \), that is \( n = \alpha^k_m \), if and only if there exists a subset of leaves \( W \subseteq F \) with \( m \in W \) such that
\[
\{n\} = \bigcap_{w \in W} N^k_w. \tag{16}
\]

In words, node \( n \) is the singleton intersection among the k-th level sets of all nodes in \( W \).

**Corollary 1.** In a tree graph, let \( n \) be a k-depth node and let \( W := D_n \cap F \). Then, \( \{n\} = \bigcap_{w \in W} N^k_w \).

Building on Lemma 3 and Corollary 1, Lemma 4 establishes a sufficient condition for recovering the connectivity of a tree.
Lemma 4. In a graph \( G = (\mathcal{N}, \mathcal{E}) \), the edge set \( \mathcal{E} \) is uniquely characterized by the set of leaf nodes \( \mathcal{F}(G) \subseteq \mathcal{N} \) and the level sets \( \{N^w(G)\}_{w=0}^w \) for all \( w \in \mathcal{F}(G) \).

Using the topology recovery condition of Lemma 4, the main identifiability result is shown next.

Theorem 1. Given probing data \((\hat{V}, \Delta)\) where \( \hat{V} = \Theta_o^{-1}I_c \Delta \) and \( \text{rank}(\Delta) = C \), the resistive network topology is uniquely identifiable by solving (12) if the grid is probed at all leaf nodes, that is \( F \subseteq C \).

Proof: The grid topology is unidentifiable given \((\hat{V}, \Delta)\) if there exists a \( \Theta \in \mathcal{M} \cap \mathcal{T} \), with \( \Theta \neq \Theta_o \) satisfying \( \Theta^{-1}I_c \Delta = \Theta_o^{-1}I_c \Delta \). Matrix \( \Theta \) is associated with a tree graph \( G \neq G_o \). Since \( \Delta \) is full row-rank, the latter condition can be expressed as \( \Theta^{-1}I_c = \Theta_o^{-1}I_c \), or if \( R := \Theta^{-1} \), then

\[
\text{RI}_C = R_o I_C.
\]

Lemma 2 and (17) imply that for every probing leaf \( m \in C \), it holds \( N^m(G)_k = N^m(G_o)_k \) for \( k = 0, \ldots, d_m \). However, Lemma 3 ensures that if \( F \subseteq C \), the connectivity of \( \Theta \) equals the connectivity of \( \Theta_o \).

So far, we have shown that \( G \) exhibits the same connectivity with \( G_o \). Nonetheless, the recovered resistances may not agree with the actual resistances. To waive that possibility, consider the edge \( \ell = (\alpha^k_m, \alpha^{k+1}_m) \) for a leaf node \( m \) and for a \( k \in \{0, \ldots, d_m\} \). For this line, it holds

\[
r(\ell) = [R]_{\alpha^k_m \alpha^{k+1}_m} = [R_o]_{\alpha^k_m \alpha^{k+1}_m} = r(\ell(G_o)).
\]

where the first and third equalities originate from Lemma 2 and the second one follows from \( R_m = R_o e_m \) [cf. (17)]. We have shown that the edges in \( G \) and \( G_o \) have identical weights, and hence, \( G \sim G_o \).

Theorem 1 asserts that as long as the grid is probed at all leaf nodes, its topology can be uniquely recovered via (12). Need that, since \( \text{rank}(\Theta) = C \), the network structure can be uniquely identified exploiting the data obtained from \( C \) probing actions, where \( C \) can be significantly smaller than the total number of buses. Other approaches instead guarantee the grid identifiability only when \( T \geq N \), e.g., see [12]. Albeit its objective and set \( M \) are convex, the optimization in [12] is challenging because \( T \) is non-convex and open. To arrive at a practical solution, we will surrogate \( T \) by adding two penalties in the objective of (12) as detailed next.

C. Convex relaxation

The property \( \Theta > 0 \) of \( T \) is equivalent to enforcing a finite lower bound on \( \log |\Theta| \). Upon dualizing the two constraints comprising \( T \), (12) can be written in its Lagrangian form as

\[
\min_{\Theta \in \mathcal{M}} f(\Theta) + \lambda_o \|\Phi(\Theta)\|_{0, \text{off}} - \mu_o \log |\Theta| \quad (18)
\]

for some \( \lambda_o, \mu_o > 0 \). The last term in the cost of (18) is convex and guarantees that the minimizer is strictly positive definite. The second term though remains non-convex. Adopting the idea of compressive sampling, the non-convex pseudonorm \( \|\Phi(\Theta)\|_{0, \text{off}} \) will be surrogated by its convex envelope \( \Phi(\Theta)\|_{1, \text{off}} := \sum_{m \neq n \in \mathcal{M}} \|\Phi(\Theta)\|_{m,n} \); see also [23], [24], [25], and [26] for related approaches aiming to recover sparse inverse covariance or sparse Laplacian matrices. If we define

\[
\Pi := I + 11^T (19)
\]

the convex function \( \|\Phi(\Theta)\|_{1, \text{off}} \) can be rewritten as

\[
\|\Phi(\Theta)\|_{1, \text{off}} = \text{Tr}(\Phi(\Theta)(I - 11^T)) = \text{Tr}(\Theta(I - 11^T)) + 2 \text{Tr}(\Theta 11^T) = \text{Tr}(\Theta \Pi).
\]

The first equality follows from the definition of the norm and because the off-diagonal entries of \( \Phi(\Theta) \) are non-positive [property (p3)]. The second equality from the definition of \( \Phi(\Theta) \) in (8), and the third one properties of the trace.

Based on the previous discussion, the non-convex problem in (18) is surrogated by the convex problem

\[
\Theta := \arg \min_{\Theta \in \mathcal{M}} \frac{1}{2} \|\Theta \hat{V} - I_c \Delta\|_W^2 + \lambda \text{Tr}(\Theta \Pi) - \mu \log |\Theta| (20)
\]

where \( \lambda, \mu > 0 \) are tunable parameters. Since the minimizer of (20) does not necessarily belong to \( T \), one may apply heuristics to convert it to the reduced Laplacian of a tree graph. As suggested in [2], one may find a minimum spanning tree for the weighted graph defined by \( \Phi(\Theta) \) using Kruskal’s or Prim’s algorithm [27]. A Laplacian \( \Theta \) belonging to \( T \) can hence be found by keeping the entries of \( \Theta \) associated with the edges found by the minimum spanning tree algorithm.

D. Topology identification algorithm

Albeit convex, the problem in (20) cannot be directly solved by standard conic optimization solvers. Moreover, the constraints in \( \mathcal{M} \) cannot be easily handled by methods such as projected gradient or block coordinate descent. For this reason, we choose to tackle (20) using ADMM. As a brief review, the ADMM method solves problems of the form

\[
\min_{x \in \mathcal{X}, z \in \mathcal{Z}} h(x) + g(z) \quad (21a)
\]

\[
s.t. \quad Fx + Gz = c \quad (21b)
\]

where \( h(x) \) and \( g(z) \) are convex functions; \( \mathcal{X} \) and \( \mathcal{Z} \) are convex sets; and \((F, G, c)\) are matrices/variables of appropriate dimensions coupling linearly \( x \) and \( z \). In its normalized form, ADMM solves the problem in (21) by iteratively repeating the next three steps for a step size \( \rho > 0 \)

\[
x^{k+1} = \arg \min_{x \in \mathcal{X}} h(x) + \frac{\rho}{2} \|Fx + Gx^k - c - m^k\|^2_2
\]

\[
z^{k+1} = \arg \min_{z \in \mathcal{Z}} g(z) + \frac{\rho}{2} \|Fx^{k+1} + Gz - c + m^k\|^2_2
\]

\[
m^{k+1} = m^k + Fx^{k+1} + Gz^{k+1} - c
\]

where \( m \) is the Lagrange multiplier vector corresponding to the linear equality constraint of (21b).
To exploit ADMM, task (20) is equivalently expressed as
\[
\min_{\Theta, \bar{z}} \frac{1}{2} \left\| \Theta \bar{V} - L_{e} \Delta \right\|_{W}^{2} + \lambda \text{Tr}(\Theta_{1} \Pi) - \mu \log |\Theta_{2}| \tag{22a}
\]
over \( \Theta, \bar{z} \geq 0, \Theta_{3}, \Theta_{4} \) \tag{22b}
s.t. \( \Theta_{3} \in S(\Gamma) \)
\( \Theta_{4} \in S_{0}(\Gamma) \) \tag{22c}
\( \Theta_{1} = \Theta_{2}, \Theta_{3} = \Theta_{3}, \Theta_{1} = \Theta_{4} \) \tag{22d}
where the original variable \( \Theta \) is replicated in four copies \( \{\Theta_{1}\}_{i=1}^{4} \), each one handling a different constraint or part of the cost function. The variables in (22) are partitioned into \( \Theta_{1} \) which is mapped to the \( x \) variable in the general ADMM form, and \( \{\Theta_{2}, \Theta_{3}, \Theta_{4}\} \) which correspond to the \( z \) ADMM variable. Let \( M_{2}, M_{3}, \) and \( M_{4} \) be the Lagrange multipliers associated with the constraints in (22).

Then, the \( x \)-update of ADMM for finding \( \Theta_{1}^{k+1} \) entails minimizing the convex quadratic cost associated with the constraints in (22) whose minimizer can be found in closed form as follows: If given \( \Theta_{2}^{k}, \Theta_{3}^{k}, \Theta_{4}^{k} \),
\[ \Theta_{1}^{k+1} = \arg \min_{\Theta_{1}} \frac{1}{2} \left\| \Theta_{1} \bar{V} - L_{e} \Delta \right\|_{W}^{2} + \lambda \text{Tr}(\Theta_{1} \Pi) \]
whose solution can be found by simply setting its gradient to zero to get the system of linear equations
\[ W \Theta_{1}^{k+1} \bar{V}^{\top} + 3 \rho \Theta_{1}^{k+1} = C^{k} \tag{23} \]
where \( C^{k} := W L_{e} \Delta \bar{V}^{\top} - \lambda \Pi - \rho (M_{2}^{k} + M_{3}^{k} + M_{4}^{k} - \Theta_{2}^{k} - \Theta_{3}^{k} - \Theta_{4}^{k}) \).

The \( z \)-update of ADMM computes \( \{\Theta_{2}^{k+1}, \Theta_{3}^{k+1}, \Theta_{4}^{k+1}\} \) given \( \Theta_{1}^{k+1} \) and the multipliers \( \{M_{2}^{k}, M_{3}^{k}, M_{4}^{k}\} \). Due to the way the variable copies have been selected and partitioned, the optimization involved in the \( z \)-update step of ADMM decouples over the three primal variables. In particular, variable \( \Theta_{2} \) is updated by solving the problem
\[ \Theta_{2}^{k+1} = \arg \min_{\Theta_{2} \geq 0} \frac{1}{2} \left\| \Theta_{1}^{k+1} \bar{V} - \Theta_{2} - M_{3}^{k} \right\|_{F}^{2} - \mu \log |\Theta_{2}| \]
whose minimizer can be found in closed form as follows: If \( U \Lambda U^{\top} \) is the eigenvalue decomposition of \( (\Theta_{1}^{k+1} + M_{3}^{k}) (\Theta_{1}^{k+1})^{\top} + (M_{3}^{k})^{\top} / 2 \), then \( \Theta_{2}^{k+1} \) is obtained as the minimizer of
\[ \Theta_{2}^{k+1} = \frac{1}{2} U \left( \Lambda + \left( \Lambda^{2} + \frac{4 \mu}{\rho} \right) \right)^{1/2} U^{\top}. \tag{24} \]

The minimization in (25) is separable over the rows of \( \Theta_{4} \). Each row can be updated in closed form as asserted by the next lemma, which follows from the related optimality conditions.

\[ \text{Lemma 5.} \quad \text{The projections of vector } y \in \mathbb{R}^{N} \text{ onto the halfspace } 1^{\top} x \geq 0 \text{ and the subspace } 1^{\top} x = 0, \text{ that is} \]
\[ \hat{x}_{h} := \arg \min_{x} \{ \| x - y \|_{2}^{2} : 1^{\top} x \geq 0 \} \]
\[ \hat{x}_{s} := \arg \min_{x} \{ \| x - y \|_{2}^{2} : 1^{\top} x = 0 \} \]
admit respectively the closed-form solutions
\[ \hat{x}_{h} = y - \frac{1}{N} [1^{\top} y]_{-} \quad \text{and} \quad \hat{x}_{s} = y - \frac{1}{N} [1^{\top} y]. \]

Finally, the Lagrange multipliers are updated according to
\[ M_{2}^{k+1} = M_{2}^{k} + \Theta_{1}^{k+1} - \Theta_{2}^{k+1} \]
\[ M_{3}^{k+1} = M_{3}^{k} + \Theta_{1}^{k+1} - \Theta_{3}^{k+1} \]
\[ M_{4}^{k+1} = M_{4}^{k} + \Theta_{1}^{k+1} - \Theta_{4}^{k+1}. \tag{26} \]

**IV. TOPOLOGY VERIFICATION**

Albeit typically operated as radial, power distribution networks are structurally meshed for reliability and maintenance. Moreover, grids are frequently reconfigured to improve voltage profiles and/or minimize losses [30]. The energized lines \( L \) are chosen from the set of existing lines denoted as \( L_{e} \). With \( L \subset L_{e} \) and \( |L_{e}| = L_{e} \). The actual grid configuration is often-times unknown to the system operator, e.g., due to unreported automatic reconfigurations [61]. This section explores how grid probing can be used for topology verification.

**A. Problem formulation**

Given probing sequences, the recorded voltages, the existing line set \( L \), and line impedances, the goal of topology verification is to find which lines are energized. A line configuration can be uniquely encoded by an \( L_{e} \)-length vector \( \mathbf{b} \), whose entry \( \mathbf{b}_{e} \) is one if line \( e \) is energized \((e \in L_{e})\); and zero, otherwise. Given the line configuration \( \mathbf{b} \), the induced ancestor, descendant, and level sets of node \( m \) will be denoted as \( A_{m}(\mathbf{b}), \ D_{m}(\mathbf{b}), \) and \( \{A_{m}(\mathbf{b})\}^{d_{m}}_{k=1} \), respectively. In addition, the related reduced Laplacian matrix can be written as
\[ \Theta(\mathbf{b}) = \mathbf{A}^{\top} \text{dg}(\mathbf{b}) \text{dg}^{-1}(\mathbf{r}) \mathbf{A} \tag{27} \]
where \( \mathbf{A} \in \mathbb{R}^{L_{e} \times N} \) is the reduced incidence matrix augmented to incorporate all lines in \( L_{e} \).

Upon probing the grid with active power injections \( L_{e} \Delta \) and recording the voltage perturbations \( \mathbf{V} \), the task of topology verification can be posed as
\[ \mathbf{b} := \arg \min_{\mathbf{b}} \| \Theta(\mathbf{b}) \mathbf{V} - L_{e} \Delta \|_{W}^{2} \tag{28a} \]
s.t. \( \mathbf{b} \in \{0, 1\}^{L_{e}} \tag{28b} \)
\[ 1^{\top} \mathbf{b} = N \tag{28c} \]
\[ \Theta(\mathbf{b}) \succ 0. \tag{28d} \]

Under the assumptions described in [13]–[15], the minimizer of (28) is in fact the maximum likelihood detector of the true line status vector \( \mathbf{b}_{o} \). In a grid with \( N + 1 \) nodes, the constraints in (28) enforce radial structure. To see this, note
that the graph induced by any $N$ edges not forming a tree is not a connected graph. The corresponding reduced incidence matrix $A(b)$ is column-rank deficient, and so $\Theta(b)$ becomes singular. Contrasting (12) to (28), the latter problem recovers line statuses while knowing resistances, whereas (12) recovers jointly the topology and line resistances.

**B. Verifiability analysis**

A pertinent question is whether probing the grid via a set of buses $C$, its topology can be uniquely recovered by (23).

**Corollary 2.** Given probing data $(\tilde{V}, \Delta)$ where $\tilde{V} = \text{R}(b_o)I_c \Delta$ and rank$(\Delta) = C$, the grid topology is verifiable by solving the problem in (28) if the grid is probed at all leaf nodes, that is $\hat{F}(b_o) \subset C$.

Corollary 2 follows from Theorem 1 and establishes that if the grid is probed at all candidate leaf nodes, its topology is verifiable. If $\hat{F}(b_o) \subset C$, problem (28) may have multiple minimizers. Nonetheless, if additional a priori knowledge is exploited, the topology may still be identifiable as quantified by the following result, built upon the next mild condition.

**Assumption 1.** All lines $\ell \in L_c$ have distinct resistances.

**Theorem 2.** Under Assumption 1, given probing data $(\tilde{V}, \Delta)$ where $\tilde{V} = \text{R}(b_o)I_c \Delta$ and rank$(\Delta) = C$, a line status vector $b$ is a minimizer of (28) if and only if it satisfies

$$A_m(b) = A_m(b_o)$$

$$N^k_m(b) = N^k_m(b_o), \quad k = 0, \ldots, d_m$$

for every probing bus $m \in C$.

Theorem 2 implies that every solution of (28) is such that the paths between the probing nodes and the substations and the level sets are correctly recovered; see Fig. 3 for a pictorial explanation. Knowing the line infrastructure can help reconstructing the unknown grid topology even if not all leaf nodes are probed. For instance, let $m$ be a non-leaf probing node. It may happen that, given a line status $b$, the connections among nodes in $N^k_m(b)$ can be uniquely determined, e.g., when there are no switching lines connecting nodes in such level set. As a result, the number of probing buses can be dramatically reduced, as shown in the ensuing example.

**Example 1.** Consider the grid of Fig. 4a) having two possible radial configurations, $b_1$ and $b_2$. Corollary 2 guarantees verifiability if all four possible leaf nodes are probed. However, the topology can be detected even if the grid is probed only at bus $m$: Assume $b_1$ is the true topology. Fig. 4b) and Fig. 4c) show that $D_m(b_1) \neq D_m(b_2)$ and $N^2_m(b_1) \neq N^2_m(b_2)$. Then, Th. 2 states that $f(b_1) \neq f(b_2)$, and thus $b_1$ is the unique solution of (28). On the other hand, when $n$ is the only probing bus, the network is not verifiable: Fig. 4d) and Fig. 4e) show that $D_n(b_1) = D_n(b_2)$. Hence, from Th. 2 it holds that $f(b_1) = f(b_2)$, so $b_1$ and $b_2$ are indistinguishable.

C. Verification algorithms

Solving (28) is non-trivial since it is a non-convex problem. An approximate line status vector can be found by considering the surrogate convex problem

$$\hat{b} := \arg \min_b \frac{1}{2} ||\Theta(b)\tilde{V} - I_c \Delta||_2^2 - \mu \log ||\Theta(b)||$$

$$\text{s.t. } b \in [0,1]^N, \quad 1^\top b = N.$$  

Comparing the optimization problems in (28) and (30), the set $\{0,1\}^N$ has been relaxed by its convex hull. Moreover, the constraint (28d) was substituted by the $-\mu \log ||\Theta(b)||$ term in (30). The latter acts as a barrier function keeping $\Theta(b)$ within the positive definite matrix cone and away from singularity.

Since (30) does not comply with the standard form of a conic problem, it can be handled by a projected gradient descent (PGD) scheme. Upon initializing $b$ at some $b^0$, the $k$-th PGD iteration reads

$$b^{k+1} := \arg \min_b \|b - b^k + \nu g(b^k)\|_2^2$$

$$\text{s.t. } b \in [0,1]^N, \quad 1^\top b = N$$

where $\nu > 0$ is a step size and $g(b^k)$ is the gradient of the objective in (30) evaluated at $b^k$. Using rules of matrix differentiation, the $\ell$-th entry of $g(b)$ is computed as

$$[g(b)]_{\ell} = a_{\ell}^\top \left[ (\Theta(b)\tilde{V} - I_c \Delta)^\top \tilde{V} - \mu \Theta^{-1}(b) \right] a_{\ell} / r_{\ell}.$$
where $\mathbf{a}_\ell^T$ is the $\ell$-th row of $\mathbf{A}$. The iterations in (31) are guaranteed to converge to a minimizer of (30) for a sufficiently small $\nu$ [28, Prop. 6.1.3]. The projection step in (31) can be handled either as a generic linearly-constrained convex quadratic program; by the lambda iteration method [11, Sec. 5.2.4]; or by dual ascent upon dualizing the constraint $\mathbf{1}^T \hat{\mathbf{b}} = N$. However, the minimizer of (30) may not lie in the original non-convex set $\{0, 1\}^N$. A feasible vector $\hat{\mathbf{b}}$ can be heuristically obtained either by selecting the lines corresponding to the largest $N$ entries of $\hat{\mathbf{b}}$, or by finding the minimum spanning tree on a graph having $\hat{\mathbf{b}}$ as edge weights.

V. Numerical Tests

The novel feeder processing schemes were validated on the IEEE 13- and 37-bus feeders [31], converted to their single-phase equivalents [9]. Additional lines were added to both feeders as shown in Fig. 5 so that the 13-bus (37-bus) testbed could operate under 7 (21) distinct radial topologies. Grid probing was performed on a per-second basis. Probing buses were equipped with inverters having the same rating as the related load. Unless otherwise stated, the buses used for probing are indicated in Fig. 5. Although our approaches rely on the approximate grid model of (3), voltages were calculated using the full ac grid model throughout our tests. During each probing action, the feeder was perturbed by switching the active injection of a single bus from its value to zero, and back. Only 12 and 32 data samples were collected for the 13-bus and 37-bus feeder case, respectively. Regarding loads, active load profiles were generated by adding a zero-mean Gaussian-distributed variation to the benchmark value; its standard deviation was 0.067 times the load nominal value. For simplicity, a lagging power factor of 0.95 was simulated, and no prior information on line statuses was assumed ($\mathbf{I} = \mathbf{1}_{11}^\top$).

The topology identification task of (20) was solved for different levels of measurement noise and values of $\lambda$. Upon experimentation, the remaining parameters were set to $\rho = 1$, $\mu = 1$, and $\mathbf{W} = \mathbf{I}$. Actual voltage magnitudes were corrupted by zero-mean Gaussian noise whose $3\sigma$ deviation matched the desired level of relative measurement noise; for example, if the actual voltage is 1 pu and the accuracy is 1%, the maximum value of noise is 1.01 and this value was mapped to the $3\sigma$ deviation of the Gaussian noise. The recovered matrices $\hat{\Theta}$ were obtained by feeding $\hat{\Theta}$ to Kruskal’s algorithm. Figure 6 reports the relative mean square error (RMSE) of $\hat{\Theta}$, that is, $\|\hat{\Theta} - \Theta\|_F$, for varying noise variances. As expected, the RMSE increases with the noise variance, while the best performance is attained for $\lambda = 0.005$. Figure 7 depicts the actual Laplacian matrix $\Theta_o$ and the recovered $\hat{\Theta}$ for $\lambda = 0.005$.

The identification and the verification schemes were also evaluated using 200 Monte Carlo runs over each feeder for a relative measurement noise of 0.01%. At every run, the actual topology was randomly drawn among all possible configurations. The identification problem in (22) was solved for $\rho = 1$, $\lambda = 5 \cdot 10^{-3}$, $\mu = 1$, and $\mathbf{W} = \mathbf{I}$. Kruskal’s algorithm was then used to obtain a Laplacian matrix $\Theta$ corresponding to a radial grid. The verification problem of (30) was solved for $\mu = 2 \cdot 10^{-8}$, $\nu = 10^{-10}$, and $\mathbf{W} = \mathbf{I}$. A feasible vector $\hat{\mathbf{b}}$ was recovered by selecting the lines corresponding to the $N$ largest entries of $\hat{\mathbf{b}}$. The connectivity of $\Theta$ and $\Theta(\hat{\mathbf{b}})$ were compared to the actual grid connectivity, and the average numbers of line status errors are reported in Table 4.

Finally, the extreme scenario of probing only two buses was tested. Figure 8 shows the identification and verification results for probing buses $\mathbf{C} = \{14, 17\}$ and $\mathbf{C} = \{4, 14\}$. Interestingly, the verification algorithm manages to estimate correctly the line connectivity under the first setup.

VI. Conclusions

The novel idea of perturbing an electric distribution network through smart inverters to actively collect data and infer its topology has been put forth here. Given voltage data collected via grid probing, the tasks of topology identification and verification have been posed as the non-convex minimization tasks of finding the Laplacian matrix of a radial graph. Using the graph-theoretic notion of a level set, probing only terminal nodes has been analytically shown to be sufficient for exact topology recovery. Convex relaxations of the original
minimization problems have been efficiently handled through closed-form ADMM updates. Numerical tests on benchmark feeders demonstrated that the novel grid probing schemes can attain line status error probabilities in the order of $10^{-2} - 10^{-3}$ by probing 40% of the buses.

Upon introducing grid probing for topology processing, this work sets the foundations for exciting research directions. Combining active and reactive probing could jointly recover the resistive and reactive Laplacian matrices. Generalizing our schemes to multiphase grids constitutes a practically pertinent and challenging problem. Processing voltage magnitude or synchrophasor data at a subset of nodes, optimally selecting probing buses, and devising real-time data processing schemes, all constitute challenging research directions.

**APPENDIX**

**Proof of Lemma 1** The proof of individual claims follow.

i) Consider the k-depth ancestor of $m$. By definition, all the descendants of $\alpha^k_m$ have depth greater than k. Hence, $\mathcal{N}^k_m \subseteq \mathcal{D}_{\alpha^k_m}$, all nodes in $\mathcal{N}^k_m$ but $\alpha^k_m$ have depth greater than k.

ii) Since $\mathcal{N}^k_m$ is a subset of $\mathcal{D}_{\alpha^k_m}$, all nodes belonging to $\mathcal{N}^k_m$ are descendants of $\alpha^k_m$. Hence, if $n \in \mathcal{N}^k_m$, its k-depth ancestor is precisely $\alpha^k_n$, and $\alpha^k_n = \alpha^k_m$. Furthermore, equation (1) implies that $\alpha^k_n = \mathcal{N}^k_n$.

iii) Let $n, s$ belong to $\mathcal{N}^k_m$. From Lemma 1(ii), it follows that they both have $\alpha^k_m$ as k-depth ancestor, i.e., $\alpha^k_n = \alpha^k_s = \alpha^k_m$.

iv) If $m$ is a leaf node at depth k, by definition $\mathcal{N}^k_m = \mathcal{D}_m = m$.

v) If $s$ is a descendant of $n$, all the ancestors of $n$ are also ancestors of $s$, i.e., $\alpha^k_s = \alpha^k_n, k \leq d_n$. As a consequence,

$$\mathcal{N}^k_m = \mathcal{D}_{\alpha^k_n} \setminus \mathcal{D}_{\alpha^k_{n+1}} = \mathcal{D}_{\alpha^k_n} \setminus \mathcal{D}_{\alpha^k_{n+1}} = \mathcal{N}^k_s$$

for $k < d_n$. On the other hand,

$$\mathcal{N}^k_m = \mathcal{D}_{\alpha^k_n} \setminus \mathcal{D}_{\alpha^k_{n+1}} = \mathcal{N}^k_s, \quad \mathcal{N}^k_m = \mathcal{D}_{\alpha^k_n} \setminus \mathcal{D}_{\alpha^k_{n+1}} = \mathcal{N}^k_s.$$

vi) Let the depth of a node $m$ be $d_m$. Being $\mathcal{N}^k_m = \mathcal{D}_m$ and $m \in \mathcal{D}_m$, $m$ belongs to $\mathcal{N}^k_m$. However for $k < d_m$, since $m \in \mathcal{D}_{\alpha^k_{m+1}}$, definition (1) implies that $m \notin \mathcal{N}^k_m$.

**Proof of Lemma 2** Assume that the linearized model of $[R_o]_{mn}$ holds true. Based on (4), one can recognize that the entry $[R_o]_{mn}$ equals the voltage drop from $v_n$ incurred at bus $n$ when a unitary active power is absorbed at bus $m$, while the remaining buses are unloaded. Leveraging this interpretation, the properties stated in Lemma 2 can be proved.

i) By applying Kirchoff’s current law, it can be shown that power flows from the substation toward $m$ only through the lines in the path between the substation and bus $m$, i.e., only on lines connecting ancestors of $m$, while no power flows on the other lines. As a consequence, two buses $n$ and $s$ belong to $\mathcal{N}^k_m$ if and only if they are equipotential, since no power is flowing in the path connecting them (see Fig. 9(a)). That is,

$$[R_o]_{nm} = v_n = v_s = [R_o]_{sm}.$$  

ii) Since unitary power is flowing from the substation to bus $m$ through lines connecting ancestors of $m$, from Kirchoff’s
voltage law it follows that
\[ r_{m,k+1} = v_{m,k+1} - v_m = [R_o]_{m,k+1} - [R_o]_{m,m} \]  
for \( k < d_m \). On the other hand, consider two buses \( n \) and \( s \) belonging to \( N^k \) and \( N^{k+1} \), respectively (see Fig. 9(b)). Then, it holds that
\[ r_{n,k+1} = [R_o]_{n,k+1} - [R_o]_{n,m} = [R_o]_{n,m} - [R_o]_{m,m} = [R_o]_{n,m} - [R_o]_{m,m} \]
where equation (32) was used; Lemma 1(ii) implied \( \alpha_n^k = \alpha_n^m \) and \( \alpha_{n+1}^k = \alpha_{n+1}^m \); and Lemma 2(i) was applied to the couples \( (n, \alpha_n^k) \) and \( (s, \alpha_s^{k+1}) \).

iii) From (32), we have that
\[ [R_o]_{m,k+1} = [R_o]_{m,m} + r_{m,k+1} \alpha_m^k. \]
By recursively applying the former relation, it follows
\[ [R_o]_{m,m} = [R_o]_{m,m} > [R_o]_{m,m}, \forall k < d_m. \]
If \( m \) is a leaf node (hence without descendants), Lemma 2(i) can be applied to show that
\[ [R_o]_{m,m} > [R_o]_{m,m}, \forall k < d_m. \]

**Proof of Lemma 2.** Consider the leaf node \( m \in F \) and its \( k \)-depth ancestor \( n = \alpha_n^k \). Select the subset of leaves \( W = F \cap D_n \) with \( m \in W \). We need to show that \( W \) satisfies (16):
\[ \bigcap_{w \in W} N^k_w = \bigcap_{w \in W} \left( D_{D_w^k} \setminus D_{D_w^{k+1}} \right) \]
\[ = \bigcap_{w \in W} \left( D_n \setminus D_{\alpha_w^{k+1}} \right) \]
\[ = D_n \setminus \bigcup_{w \in W} D_{\alpha_w^{k+1}} \]
\[ = \{ n \}. \]
The first equality follows by the definition in (1); the second one holds since \( n = \alpha_n^k \) for all \( w \in W \); the third one is an identity for set operations; and the last holds by recognizing that \( \bigcup_{w \in W} D_{\alpha_w^{k+1}} = D_n \setminus \{ n \} \).

The converse will be shown by contradiction. Suppose there exists a \( W \subseteq F \) with \( m \in W \) that satisfies (16) yet \( n \neq \alpha_n^m \). Since the only \( k \)-depth node in \( N_n^m \) is \( \alpha_n^m \), node \( n \) has to have depth greater than \( k \), i.e., \( d_n > k \). From Lemma 1 if \( n \in N_n^m \), then \( \alpha_n^k \in N_n^w \) as well for all \( w \in W \). It therefore follows that
\[ \{ n, \alpha_n^k \} \subseteq \bigcap_{w \in W} N^k_w. \]
Heed that nodes \( n \) and \( \alpha_n^k \) are distinct because \( d_n = k < d_m \). Hence, the intersection in the RHS of (33) is not unique contradicting (16) and proving the claim. ■

**Proof of Lemma 4.** For the sake of contradiction, assume there exists another tree graph \( G' \in (N, \alpha') \) with \( \alpha' \neq \alpha \) such that \( F(G) = F(G') \) and \( \{ N^k_w(G) = N^k_w(G') \}_{k=0} \) for all \( w \in F(G) \). Note that \( d_w(G) = d_w(G') \) for all \( w \in F \) since by hypothesis the level sets of \( w \) agree across the two graphs.

The notation \( T_n(G) \) represents the vertex-induced subtree created by maintaining only the nodes in \( D_n(G) \) along with their incident edges. Since \( G' \neq G \), there exists a subtree \( T_n(G') \) with the properties: (i) it appears also in the original graph, that is \( T_n(G') = T_n(G) \); and (ii) the line \( e' = (m, n) \in \mathcal{E}' \) feeding the node \( n \) in \( G' \) does not occur in the original graph (\( e' \notin \mathcal{E} \)). Such a \( T_n(G') \) exists and it may be the singleton \( T_n(G') = \{ n \} \) for any leaf node \( n \in F(G) = F(G') \).

Let the depths of nodes \( n \) and \( m \) in \( G' \) be \( d_m(G') = k-1 \) and \( d_n(G') = k \). Then, it holds that
\[ m = \alpha_n^{k-1}(G'), \text{ but } m \neq \alpha_n^{k-1}(G). \]  
We will next show that \( d_m(G') \neq d_m(G) \). To do so, consider a leaf node \( s \in T_n(G') \) without excluding the case \( s = n \). From (34), we have that node \( m \) is also the \((k-1)\)-depth ancestor of \( s \) in \( G' \) but not in \( G \), that is
\[ m = \alpha_n^{k-1}(G'), \quad (35a) \]
\[ m \neq \alpha_s^{k-1}(G). \quad (35b) \]
From Lemma 1 and (35a), we get that \( m \in N^{k-1}(G') \). Equation (35b) on the other hand along with the hypothesis \( N^{k-1}(G') = N^{k-1}(G) \), i.e., \( d_m(G) > k-1 = d_m(G') \).
Hence, node \( m \) has different depths in \( G \) and \( G' \).

Consider now the set \( W := D_{m}(G') \cap F(G') \). By definition of \( W \), it holds that \( m = \alpha_n^{k-1}(G') \) for all \( w \in W \). Invoking Corollary 1 it follows that
\[ \{ m \} = \bigcap_{w \in W} N^{k-1}_w(G'). \]  
However, in \( G \) it holds that \( m \neq \alpha_n^{k-1}(G) \) for any \( w \in W \) since \( d_m(G) > k-1 \). Hence, Lemma 1 provides that
\[ \{ m \} \neq \bigcap_{w \in W} N^{k-1}_w(G). \]  
The results in (36) and (37) imply that \( N^{k-1}_w(G') \neq N^{k-1}_w(G) \) for some leaf nodes \( w \), which is a contradiction.

**Proof of Theorem 2.** If \( b \) is feasible, it is also a minimizer of (28) if and only if it yields zero objective value as \( b_o \) does. That happens when \( R(b)I_C = R(b_o)I_C \). Since \( \text{rank}(\Delta) = C \), the latter implies \( R(b)I_C = R(b_o)I_C \), or
\[ R(b)e_m = R(b_o)e_m, \forall m \in C. \]  
Heed that, if \( R(b)e_m = R(b_o)e_m \), Lemma 2(claim (i)) implies that \( d_m(b) = d_m(b_o) \) and that, for all \( k = 1, \ldots, d_m \)
\[ N^k_m(b) = N^k_m(b_o). \]
For every \( n \in N^k_m(b) \) and \( s \in N^{k-1}_m(b) \), (38) implies
\[ [R(b)]_{mn} - [R(b)]_{ms} = [R(b_o)]_{mn} - [R(b_o)]_{ms}. \]  
Combining (39) with Lemma 2(claim (ii)), provides
\[ [R(b)]_{mn} - [R(b)]_{ms} = r_{\alpha_n^{k-1}(b_o), \alpha_{m-1}^{k-1}(b_o)}. \]  
Under Assumption 1, no two lines have the same resistance. Therefore, equation (40) is satisfied only if \( \alpha_n^{k}(b) = \alpha_m^{k}(b_o) \) for \( k = 0, \ldots, d_m \), and hence, \( A_m(b) = A_m(b_o) \) follows.
To prove sufficiency, suppose the conditions in (29) hold for a probing bus \( m \). Equations (29a) and (4) ensure that \( d_m(b) = d_m(b_o) \).
$d_m(b_o)$ and that $[R(b)]_{mn} = [R(b_o)]_{mn}$ for all $n \in A_m(b_o)$. On the other hand, Lemma 2 guarantees that $[R(b)]_{mn} = [R(b_o)]_{mn}$ for all $n \in N^p_m(b)$ and $k = 0, \ldots , d_m$. It therefore follows that $R(b)I_c = R(b_o)I_c$.}

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