

Master thesis proposal: Peak water using the Open Global Glacier Model

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1 Motivation

Glacier mass loss has increased during the second half of the 20th century (Vaughan et al., 2013) and is predicted, in all current climate projections, to continue throughout the 21st century (IPCC, 2014). The magnitude of the end of century glacial mass loss varies greatly depending on the region and climate scenario – Huss and Hock (2015) found global glacier volumes to decrease between 25% (RCP2.6) and 48% (RCP8.5) and regional losses varying between 20 and 90%.

Glaciers play an important role as a form of water storage, delaying up to 79% of the total precipitation falling on the glacier surface (Aral Basin) through the release of meltwater during the ablation season. Benefits of this seasonal delay is particularly important in regions with a warm and dry ablation season (Kaser et al., 2010). One of those areas is the Indus basin where, during the pre-monsoon season, up to 60% of the total irrigation volume comes from either snow or glacier melt – resulting in an 11% increase of the total crop production (Biemans et al., 2019). Simultaneously, the Indus basin is an example of a large river basin which under the present climate experiences water scarcity – threatening the food security of millions of people (Kummu et al., 2014). This in an area where large amounts of the freshwater resource is shared across state borders where the risk for armed conflict is high (Pritchard, 2019; Schleussner et al., 2016).

The populated areas on the dry, western, slopes of the Andes are other examples of regions depending on glacier meltwater for potable water and power generation. Vergara et al. (2007) estimate the cost of mitigation and adaption to retreating glaciers in the Andes to between US\$300 million and US\$ 1.5 billion.

Maybe something on Europe? But no real scarcity here?

2 State of the art – Glacial hydrology

Glaciers store water in multiple ways – as a liquid in surface snow and firn, in crevasses, drainage networks, englacial pockets and surface pools, or as a solid in the form of snow, firn and ice (Jansson et al., 2003). The main factors controlling the discharge hydrograph of an Alpine basin is the topographical structure, the seasonal air temperature gradient, the seasonal distribution of precipitation (Zappa et al., 2003), and the percentage of glaciated area within the basin (Jansson et al., 2003).

Melt is the process with the largest contribution to glacier runoff, resulting in that the fraction of summer runoff to the annual runoff increases with an increased glaciation (Chen &

Ohmura, 1990; Zappa et al., 2003). Furthermore, Bliss et al. (2014) showed that glacier net mass loss is an important part of the total glacier runoff, indicating that the societal importance of glacier melt water might be higher than the estimates from Kaser et al. (2010), where runoff estimates were done under an assumed equilibrium.

The term ‘peak water’ is an adaption of the more well known term *Peak Oil* – which indicates the period in time when production of oil reaches a maximum, after which it begins to decrease (Gleick & Palaniappan, 2010). Recently this term has been applied to meltwater generation from glaciers (e.g. Huss and Hock, 2018) as a way to put the impacts of shrinking glaciers into a societal context. The mechanism behind glacial peak water is fairly straight forward: When climate change causes a glacier to recede, water is released from long term glacial storage and the annual runoff will increase until a maximum is reached i.e. peak water. At this point and forward the annual runoff will begin to decrease since the area of the shrinking glacier is not able to produce the same amounts of meltwater any longer (Jansson et al., 2003). If the glacier reaches a new state of equilibrium (zero net mass loss), the annual runoff from the initially glaciated area can return to pre peak water levels. However, runoff levels during the melt season can be expected to fall below the pre peak water levels since melt water from long term storage will be reduced (Huss & Hock, 2018; Immerzeel et al., 2013; Ragettli et al., 2016) (see Fig. 1) (This citation needs some work).

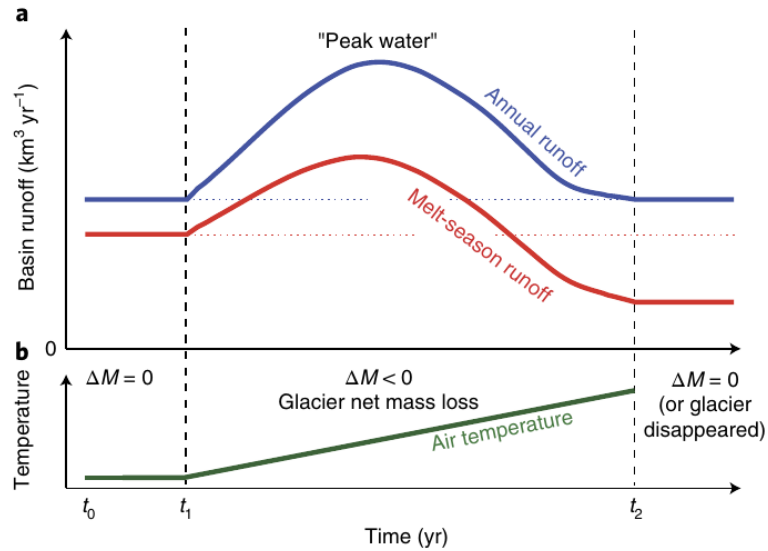


Figure 1: Schematised view of glacier runoff and peak water during a transient state. The annual glacier runoff will be constant from year to year during equilibrium. If the conditions change so that the glacier is no longer in equilibrium with its climate and the glacier begins to lose mass, the melt season runoff will increase with rising temperatures. Borrowed from Huss and Hock (2018).

3 Peak water using the Open Global Glacier Model

State of the art peak water estimations (e.g. Huss and Hock, 2018; Rounce et al., 2020) have relied on parametrizing the re-distribution of mass throughout the glacier with so called mass re-distribution curves, developed by Huss et al. (2010). This parameterization is a clear step up in performance compared to previous ice flow parametrizations (e.g. length-area scaling), but still relies on multiple DEMs covering the glacier for calibration of the flow as a function of the mass balance. As a consequence, the flow, or mass re-distribution, of non-measured glaciers will be estimated from known glaciers of a similar size not considering topographical differences.

Employing the Open Global Glacier Model (OGGM, Maussion et al., 2019) for peak water calculations would be the first time a physical ice flow model is applied globally to calculate glacier runoff. It would be a step towards mitigating the problem of over parametrization present in the current global glacier models used for hydrological analysis. Including ice dynamics in global glacier simulations result in reduced ice losses compared to parametrized models (Zekollari et al., 2019), possibly resulting in more accurate runoff estimations. The inclusion of ice dynamics also enables the glacier to grow, if climatic conditions allow it, and not only to shrink – a limitation of parametrized ice dynamics. Using the OGGM will thus provide a new view of global glacier runoff and peak water estimations, expanding the grasp of the subject.

In its current state the OGGM does not calculate any hydrological outputs for the glaciers (not true any more...). This has to be implemented before any runoff simulations. The common approach is to use a so called fixed gauge – a hypothetical measuring station at the terminus of the glacier, measuring all water leaving the initially glaciated area. Runoff, Q , is calculated from the ablation α , the liquid precipitation p_{liquid} , and the refreezing of meltwater within the glacier R as:

$$Q = \alpha + p_{liquid} - R. \quad (1)$$

The contribution from ablation is made up of ice and snow melt, which can be estimated from the excess melt water of the glacier. This is where it becomes a bit tricky. Excess meltwater is produced during years with a negative mass balance, but since this can vary from year to year excess meltwater has to be calculated retroactively for each mass-balance year. This process starts with calculating the total excess meltwater for the period in question (i.e. net mass change). This can then be distributed, sequentially, to all negative mass-balance year where mass is not regained in the future (Rounce et al., 2020). Runoff originating from snow melt and liquid precipitation is measured from the initially glaciated area. As the glaciated area shrinks, this fraction of the runoff is divided into two parts: on glacier runoff and off glacier runoff. The OGGM does not parametrize refreezing, and instead relies on the calibration of the mass balance model to compensate for this.

3.1 Research questions

For this thesis I will try to answer the following questions:

1. **How does the inclusion of ice dynamics in a global glacier model change the future temporal and spatial variation of peak water?** The inclusion of ice dynamics will results in a different annual mass balance compared to models relying on parametrization. Since the runoff estimations are based on the mass balance – any changes to its calculation should result in a different estimate of peak water.
2. **High mountain Asia, when will the basins most dependent on glacier runoff reach peak water?** This would basically be done to corroborate on the previous studies that have been done. The **Indus basin**.
3. **At which levels, and during what time, will runoff levels begin to stabilise again?** Peak water gives a measure of when the annual runoff from glaciers reaches a maximum, but what about the long term equilibrium? What will the future water supply look like?
4. **How will the seasonal hydrograph change for future runoff projections?** Will glaciers release water earlier in the season? Or later? Also connects to the previous question – how is the annual runoff affected?

4 Schedule or something

Hydrological outputs were recently implemented in the OGGM, but still need to be evaluated and fully integrated into the model. To make sure that this is doing what is intended is the first step of this work. This include testing the implementation, running a few simulations on a smaller scale and document it. Based on results from previous studies, a number of regions interesting in regards to peak water can be selected for long term simulations using the OGGM. To evaluate the affect of ice dynamics on glacier runoff the results can then be compared to previous studies. A regional analysis is a natural continuation of this – Take a look at the Indus basin.

Evaluating future stabilised levels requires the glaciers to have reached a new equilibrium. If, and when, glaciers will reach a new equilibrium is kind of an open question and would require to run the simulation for 100s of years. So not actually sure if this will be possible.

The seasonal hydrology will be analysed in conjunction with the regional analysis of one or two regions where the global simulations showed interesting results in terms of peak water.

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