Details

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Crack to pulse transition and magnitude statistics during earthquake cycles on a self-similar rough fault

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Abstract

Faults in nature demonstrate fluctuations from planarity at most length scales that are relevant for earthquake dynamics. These fluctuations may influence all stages of the seismic cycle; earthquake nucleation, propagation, arrest, and inter-seismic behavior. Here I show quasi-dynamic plane-strain simulations of earthquake cycles on a self-similar 10 km long rough fault with amplitude-to-wavelength ratio $\alpha = 0.01$. The minimum roughness wavelength, λ_{min}, and nucleation length scales are well resolved and much smaller than the fault length. Stress dissipation and fault loading is implemented using a variation of the backslip approach, which allows for efficient simulations of multiple cycles without stresses becoming unrealistically large. I explore varying λ_{min} for the same stochastically generated realization of a rough fractal fault. Decreasing λ_{min} causes the minimum and maximum earthquakes sizes to decrease. Thus the fault seismicity is characterized by smaller and more numerous earthquakes, on the other hand, increasing the λ_{min} results in fewer and larger events. However, in all cases, the inferred b-value is constant and the same as for a reference no-roughness simulation ($\alpha = 0$). Further, the characteristics of individual ruptures are also altered and here I highlight a new mechanism for generating pulse-like ruptures. Seismic events are initially crack-like, but at a critical length scale, they continue to propagate as pulses, locking in an approximately fixed amount of slip. I investigate this transition using simple arguments and derive a characteristic pulse length and slip distance based on roughness drag. I hypothesize that the ratio λ_{min}/α^2 could be roughly estimated from kinematic rupture models. Furthermore, I suggest that the ergodicity of planar and rough fault simulations may be different.

Keywords: Rough faults, Rate-and-state friction, Earthquake cycle simulations, Earthquake statistics, Earthquake ruptures, Pulses
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1. Introduction

Most modeling studies of earthquakes and the seismic cycle idealize faults as planar surfaces. However, a large body of work has shown that faults and rock surfaces are not planar (e.g. Brown and Scholz, 1985; Power et al., 1987; Power and Tullis; Sagy et al., 2007; Candela et al., 2012). It has been established that fluctuations from planarity in faults are statistically fractal and self-affine (see Section 1.1 for details). It has become increasingly important to understand how and when planar models accurately capture key characteristics of individual ruptures as well as fault behavior during the entire seismic cycles.

Recently, several studies have simulated earthquakes on fractal faults. In most cases a single rupture is simulated, where the stress distribution and initial conditions are assumed before artificially nucleating the rupture (Dunham et al., 2011a; Fang and Dunham, 2013; Shi and Day, 2013; Bruhat et al., 2016). These studies have included many of the relevant physics such as off-fault plasticity and full elastodynamic effects. However, they are too computationally expensive to simulate multiple earthquake cycles which would include inter-seismic and post-seismic slip, as well as natural nucleation. This means that the assumed initial stress distribution may strongly influence the length and propagation characteristics of the simulated ruptures. A more complete approach would ideally allow stresses to evolve naturally over multiple cycles.

Other models have been developed that simulate the whole seismic cycle (Tal et al., 2018; Tal and Hager, 2018a; Ozawa et al., 2019). However, these methods lack a mechanism for stress dissipation, such as off-fault plasticity, and are purely elastic. This means that only a few cycles can be simulated before stresses build-up due to geometric incompatibility

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and reach unrealistic values. These studies cannot investigate behavior over multiple cycles. Recently, Allam et al. (2019) used the RSQsim cycle simulator to simulate seismicity on a self-affine fault over multiple cycles. They used a backslip to dissipate stresses and thus achieve an efficient way to simulate long term fault behavior. However, Allam et al. (2019) used oversized dislocations and did not resolve the relevant length-scales that arise from elasticity and the assumed friction law. Such models generally produce complex behavior that becomes simpler with grid refinement (Rice, 1993; Ben-Zion and Rice, 1997). Since we expect fault roughness to produce complexity, it may be hard to untangle the contribution of the oversized dislocations versus the fault roughness.

Here I show results from a 2D plane-strain boundary element model with frictional properties governed by rate-and-state friction where state evolution evolves according to the aging law (Dieterich, 1979; Ruina, 1983). The simulations are quasi-dynamic and implement a variation of the backslip approach to dissipate stresses. Thus unlike previous work, I report results from multiple cycles without unrealistic stress build-up, but at the same time, discretization is chosen such that all relevant lengths and time-scales are fully resolved. While many previous studies have focused on the amplitude-to-wavelength ratio of the roughness (e.g. Tal and Hager, 2018b; Bruhat et al., 2016), I focus on systematically varying the minimum roughness wavelength of the fault. The range of λ_{min} explored is from 1/3 to 10 times the nucleation length for a planar fault.

1.1. Background

In this study, I investigate a strictly self-similar and statistically fractal fault. Self-similarity, in this case, implies the root-mean-square (RMS) fluctuations from planarity h_{RMS} are linearly proportional to the fault segment length L (Power and Tullis), in other words

$$h_{RMS} = \alpha L, \tag{1}$$

where α is the amplitude-to-wavelength ratio. Faults that obey such self-similarity have a power spectral density (PSD) (Power and Tullis):

$$P_h(k) = (2\pi)^3\alpha^2|k|^{-3}, \tag{2}$$

where $k = 2\pi/\lambda$ is the wavenumber (λ is the wavelength). Fault roughness is often characterized in terms of the Hurst exponent H, where $h_{RMS} = \alpha L^H$, with $H = 1$ implying strict self-similarity. Fang and Dunham (2013) showed that for a sufficiently long wavelength slip on a self-similar fault, the average resistance to sliding due to geometric complexity is given by the roughness drag:

$$\tau_{drag} = 8\pi^3\alpha^2\frac{\mu}{1-\nu}\frac{\delta}{\lambda_{min}}, \tag{3}$$

where δ is slip magnitude and λ_{min} is the minimum wavelength that is present in the fault profile (other symbols are defined in Table 1). The spatial extent of the slip patch must be much larger than λ_{min} for this to be valid. Roughness drag can be generalized to self-affine fault (Ozawa et al., 2019), but here I focus on the strictly self-similar case. In Section 3.1.1, I will use roughness drag to understand the certain rupture characteristic of the simulations in a quantitative manner.

Typically real faults are found to have α in the range of $10^{-3} - 10^{-2}$ (Power et al., 1987). The value likely depends on the maturity (cumulative amount of slip) of a fault, which the upper limit corresponding to less mature faults (Sagy et al., 2007). In this study, I have taken $\alpha = 0.01$, thus possibly representing an immature fault. This choice of α is also motivated by computational reasons since it allows interesting effects of the roughness to manifest at smaller length scales. Some studies found fault surfaces to be largely self-affine with a $H = 0.8$ in the direction of slip, but with a different slope at other scales (Candela et al., 2012). However, it has been argued that a self-similar scaling ($H = 1$) can well fit all resolvable scales simultaneously (Shi and Day, 2013).

The roughness drag τ_{drag} (Eq. 3) has α^2 dependence on amplitude-to-wavelength ratio, for small α the drag could be assumed small. However, the roughness drag also depends on δ/λ_{min}. Implying that τ_{drag} diverges as $\lambda_{min} \to 0$ for all non-zero values of α. Clearly if λ_{min} is sufficiently small, yielding of the material will occur as δ increases, thus limiting the roughness drag resistance. Fang and Dunham (2013), suggested this may occur when $\delta/\lambda_{min} \approx 1$. The fact that faults are found to be rough over virtually all scales suggests that λ_{min} may be very small and may, therefore, be an important contributor to τ_{drag}, at least up to a point when yielding occurs, that is why I have chosen to focus on λ_{min} in this study.

2. Model Description

I use a boundary element method to mesh a fault surface $h(x)$ (Figure 1). The slip on each element (or dislocation) is assumed to be tangential to $h(x)$ (Figure 1d). That is, the dislocation is tilted at an angle $\theta = \arctan(dh/dx))$. By use of analytical solutions for elastic dislocations in full-space (Nikkhoo et al., 2016) I compute a matrix of influence coefficients that relate slip vector $\boldsymbol{\delta}$ and changes in shear $\boldsymbol{\tau}$ and normal stress $\boldsymbol{\sigma}$ at the center of each dislocation:

$$\boldsymbol{\tau}' = \boldsymbol{G}_\tau \boldsymbol{\delta}' \text{ and } \boldsymbol{\sigma}' = \boldsymbol{G}_\sigma \boldsymbol{\delta}', \tag{4}$$

where the meaning of $\boldsymbol{\delta}'$ versus $\boldsymbol{\delta}$ is discussed later. The matrices of influence coefficients are compressed using the H-matrix approach of Bradley and Segall (2011). The frictional interface is governed by rate-and-state friction and aging law, respectively:

$$\frac{\tau_0 + \boldsymbol{\tau}' - \eta \boldsymbol{V}}{\sigma_0 + \boldsymbol{\sigma}'} = f_0 + a \log\left(\frac{\boldsymbol{V}}{V_0}\right) + b \log\left(\frac{V_0 \boldsymbol{\theta}}{d_c}\right) \tag{5}$$

$$\dot{\boldsymbol{\theta}} = 1 - \frac{\boldsymbol{\theta} \cdot \boldsymbol{V}}{d_c}, \tag{6}$$

where $\boldsymbol{V}$ and $\boldsymbol{\theta}$ represent the slip speed and state at the center of each dislocation respectively. Eq. 5 can be rearranged to provide an approximation for the slip speed at time step $n+1$ given that the relevant fields are known at time step n.

$$\boldsymbol{V}_{n+1} = V_0 \exp\left(\frac{\boldsymbol{\tau}_n - \eta \boldsymbol{V}_n}{a \boldsymbol{\sigma}_n} - f_0/a - \frac{b}{a} \log(V_0 \boldsymbol{\theta}_n / d_c)\right), \tag{7}$$

Table 1: Reference parameters that are kept constant in the study

Symbol	Description	Value
Material properties		
ν	Poisson's ratio	0.25
μ	Shear modulus	30 GPa
c_s	Shear wave speed	3.5 km/s
Friction		
d_c	Characteristic state evolution distance	100 μm
a	Rate dependence of friction	0.01
b	State dependence of friction	0.0125
V_0	Steady state sliding velocity	10^{-9} m/s
f_0	Steady state coefficient of friction at V_0	0.6
σ_0'	Initial effective normal stress	100 MPa
Fault		
α	Amplitude-to-wavelength ratio	0.01
L	Fault length along x-axis	10 km
Other parameters dependent on parameters above		
L_∞	Critical crack half-length	$\frac{\mu d_c}{\pi(1-\nu)\sigma_0 b} \cdot \left(\frac{b}{b-a}\right)^2 \approx 29.3825\,\mathrm{m}\dagger$
$b-a$	Degree of rate-weakening	0.0025
η	Radiation damping	$\mu/(2c_s) \approx 4.2857\,\mathrm{MPa}\cdot\mathrm{s/m}\dagger\dagger$
τ_0	Initial shear stress	$f_0\sigma_0 + \eta V_0 \approx 60.0000\,\mathrm{MPa}$
θ_0	Initial state	$d_c/V_0 \cdot (1+\mathcal{N}(0, 0.01))$
Notes		
†	(Rubin and Ampuero, 2005)	
††	(Rice, 1993)	
$\mathcal{N}(m, s)$	Gaussian noise, mean m, std. s	

where $\boldsymbol{\tau}_n = \tau_0 + \boldsymbol{\tau}'_n$ and $\boldsymbol{\sigma}_n = \sigma_0 + \boldsymbol{\sigma}'_n$. It is worth noting that at very high slip speeds ($\sim$ 1 cm/s) a few iteration are attempted where $\boldsymbol{V}_n$ is slightly adjusted to better satisfy Eq. 7, otherwise spurious oscillations will appear. The state variable is integrated as

$$\boldsymbol{\theta}_{n+1} = \boldsymbol{\theta}_n + \mathrm{d}t_n \left(1 - \boldsymbol{\theta}_n \boldsymbol{V}_n / d_c\right). \tag{8}$$

The time step determined by

$$\mathrm{d}t_{n+1} = \min([\epsilon d_c / \max(\boldsymbol{V}_n), \epsilon \min(\boldsymbol{\theta}_n)]), \tag{9}$$

where ϵ is adjusted such that stability and convergence is found. The slip is updated as at each time step: $\boldsymbol{\delta}_{n+1} = \boldsymbol{\delta}_n + \mathrm{d}t_n \boldsymbol{V}_n$. The problem is initialized such that $\boldsymbol{\tau} = \tau_0$, $\boldsymbol{\sigma} = \sigma_0$ and $\boldsymbol{\theta} = d_c/V_0(1 + \mathcal{N}(0, 0.01))$ at all dislocation centers (See Table 1). The fault is thus approximately at steady state $\boldsymbol{V} = V_0$ initially apart form small amplitude Gaussian white noise added to the initial state. A planar infinite fault with the same frictional properties will oscillate around V_0 as long as the long term average of the elastic stress transfer is $\boldsymbol{\tau}' = 0$. This is reasonable, otherwise the long term average velocity of the fault would be changing, which can only occur if the loading is changed. The problem is more complicated for a non-planar and/or finite faults if the medium doesn't dissipate the stresses (which is the case for a perfectly elastic solid) then as $\boldsymbol{\delta}$ increases so do the stresses. However, the stresses in the medium and on the fault must on average relax at the same rate as the loading rate, otherwise they would simply build up indefinitely. I approximate this process using the backslip approach (Richards-Dinger and Dieterich, 2012), where I have defined $\boldsymbol{\delta}' = \boldsymbol{\delta} - V_0 t$. Which is then used in Eq. 4 to compute the elastic stress transfer. This approach differs from the RSQsim backslip implementation (Richards-Dinger and Dieterich, 2012; Allam et al., 2019), since I do not have to slip the faults backwards to determine the backslip stressing rate. I've simply formulated the problem such that the average steady state speed on the fault V_0 is also the loading rate.

The fault profile (Figure 1) is stochastically generated with a power spectral density in Eq. 2 using the implementation of Dunham et al. (2011a). The dislocation length projected on the x-axis was set to 1 m. The smallest $\lambda_{min} \approx 10$ m and is thus resolved in the simulations. Frictional properties (see Table 1) are set such that the crack half-length which marks the transition from nucleation to a dynamic instability is constant $L_\infty \approx 30$ m and is therefore also well resolved. The fault profile was generated with λ_{min} ranging from $L_\infty/3$ to $10 \cdot L_\infty$, but in all cases with the same random seed such that the Fourier decomposition at larger wavelengths in identical in both magnitude and phase.

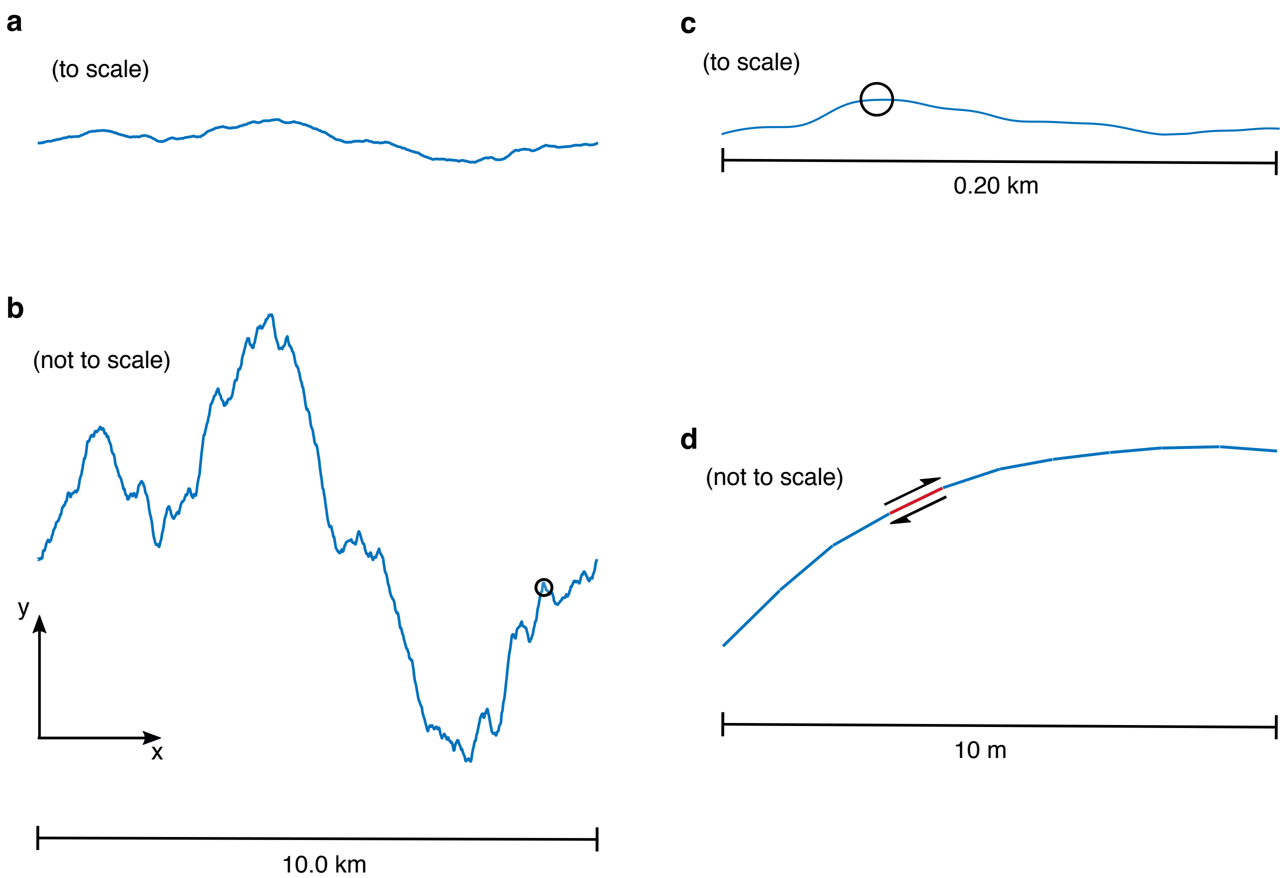

Figure 1: Fault profile at various scales for $\lambda_{min} = 2L_\infty/3$. **a** shows the entire fault at the correct length to amplitude ratio. **b** same as **a** except with exaggerated amplitude. Small circle shows the location of the fault segment shown in **c**. Circle in **c** shows the fault segment shown in **d** which displays the length scale of the discretization. Red segment shows the length of one dislocation sliding tangentially to the fault topography.

3. Results

3.1. Rupture characteristics

We start by visualizing the cumulative slip in all simulations (Figures 2, 3 and 4)

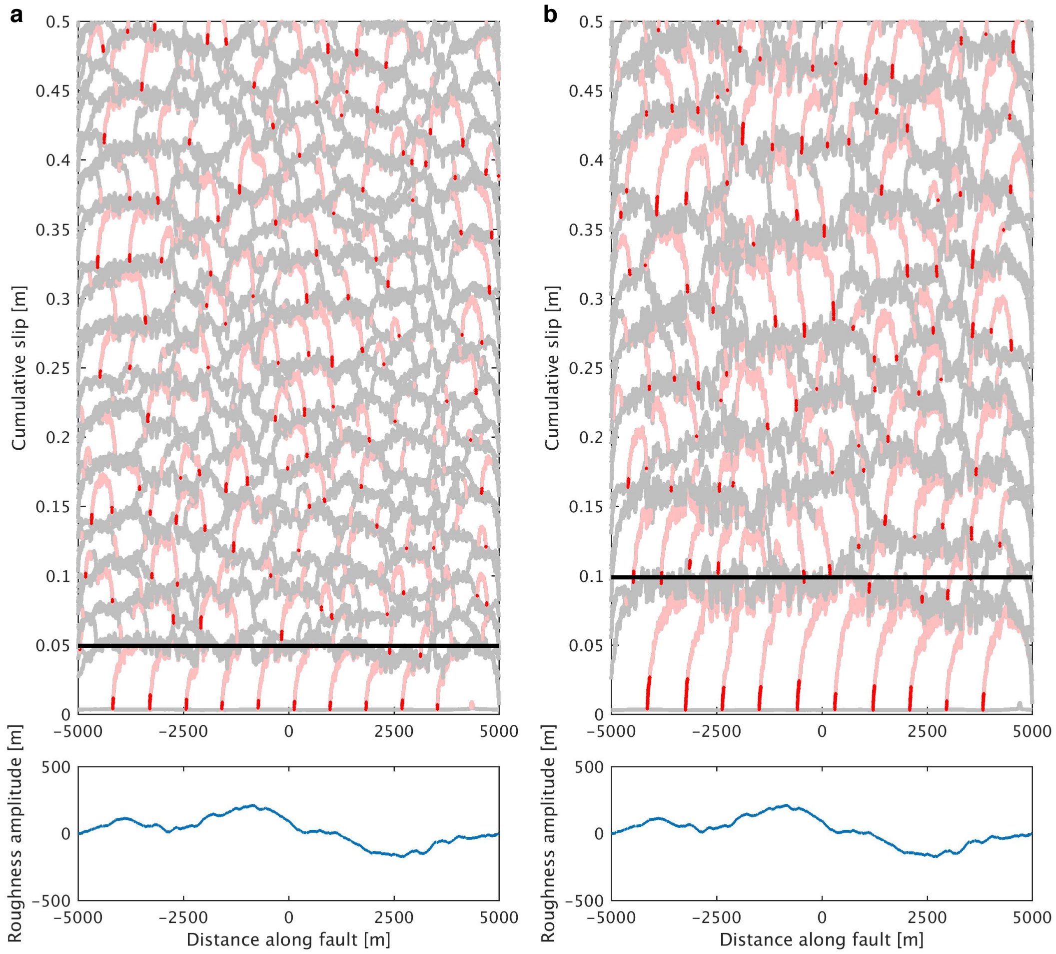

Figure 2: Snapshots of cumulative slip as a function of distance along fault. Red lines indicate points slipping faster than 1 m/s, pale pink lines indicate slip speeds larger than 1 cm/s. Grey lines are points slipping $\leq$ 1 cm/s. **a** shows results for $\lambda_{min} = L_\infty/3$, **b** shows results for $\lambda_{min} = 2L_\infty/3$. Bottom panels shows corresponding fault roughness, at the scale shown the fault profiles appear identical. Black line is the estimate of δ_c, the maximum slip distance estimate discussed in Section 3.1.1

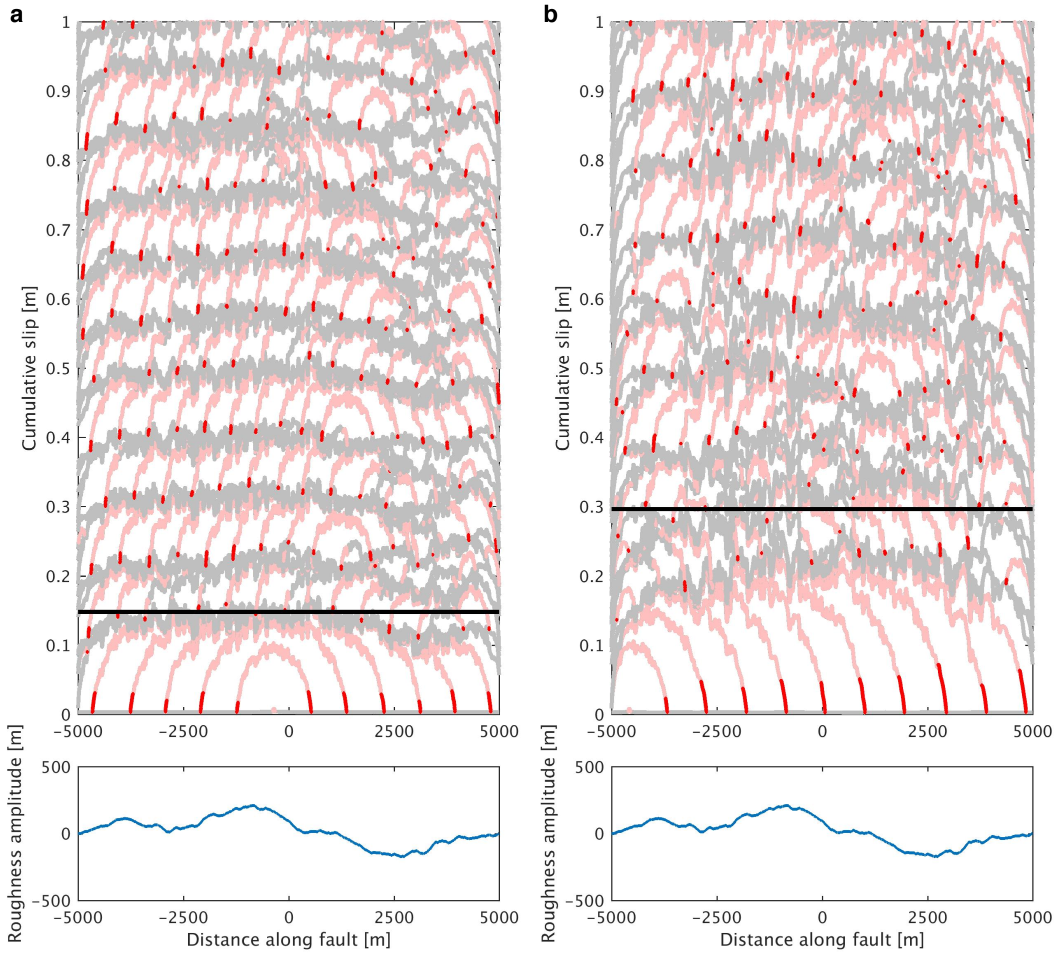

Figure 3: Same as Figure 2 except **a** shows results for $\lambda_{min} = L_\infty$, **b** shows results for $\lambda_{min} = 2L_\infty$. Note that the cumulative slip scale is different compared to Figure 2.

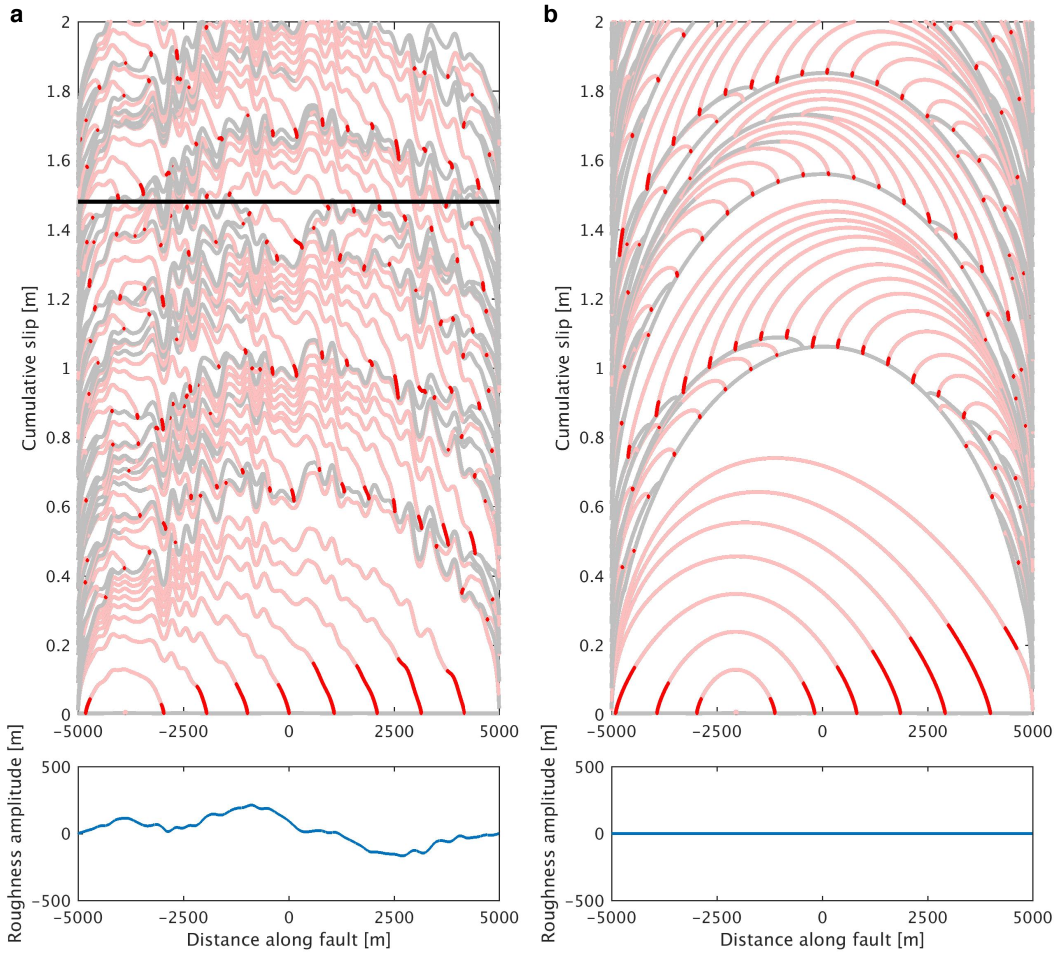

Figure 4: Same as Figure 2 except **a** shows results for $\lambda_{min} = 10L_\infty$, **b** shows a reference simulation of a planar fault. Note that the cumulative slip scale is different compared to Figures 2 and 3. No δ_c value exists for a planar and maximum slip distance is determined by fault finiteness and frictional properties, for **a** δ_c, significantly over-predicts the maximum slip distance because fault finiteness becomes the limiting factor before slip reaches δ_c

From the slip profiles above we observe that initially the rupture always propagates the whole length of the fault. However, later events tend to be partial ruptures except when λ_{min} is large (Figure 4). Initially, the shear and normal stresses are selected to be spatially uniform, and the stress changes due to geometric complexity induced by the actively propagating rupture are not sufficient to arrest the rupture. Once the initial rupture has terminated, the resulting heterogeneous stress field can arrest ruptures and limits the event sizes. The results thus suggest that the assumed initial stress field in single rupture simulations on rough faults may be the primary control on the resulting rupture dimensions.

Another important observation from the simulations is that if events become sufficiently large, they transition from being crack-like to pulse-like, once they transition to pulse-like propagation, the events lock in an approximately fixed amount of slip. This is clear in simulations reported in Figures 2 and 3, whereas the fault in Figure 4a isn't sufficiently large to show this transition and is qualitatively similar to the planar fault simulation (Figure 4b). The crack to pulse transition suggests that ruptures may have reached a length scale at which roughness drag becomes important (Eq. 3). In the next subsection, I further analyze the transition from a crack to pulse.

3.1.1. Crack to pulse transition

Let us hypothesize that transition from crack to pulse occurs approximately when the stress drop is equal to the roughness drag $\Delta\tau = \tau_{drag}$. Under these conditions it cannot be energetically favorable for a fault patch to slip further. Assuming a simple constant stress drop in-plane crack of half-length L_c then $\Delta\tau = (2\mu\bar{\delta})/(\pi(1-\nu)L_c)$, where $\bar{\delta}$ is the average slip. Setting $\Delta\tau = \tau_{drag}$ provides:

$$L_c = \frac{\lambda_{min}}{4\pi^4\alpha^2}, \tag{10}$$

which we interpret as a characteristic length scale for the crack to pulse transition. Remarkably, this scale only depends on roughness parameters λ_{min} and α^2 and not mechanical properties of the host rock and not the friction law, as long as the friction law favors instabilities that become crack-like. By comparing L_c to slip speed profiles during pulse-like propagation, we find that L_c well characterizes the dimension of the slip patch that is slipping approximately fast enough to radiating seismic energy (Figure 5). We may thus consider L_c as a characteristic dimension of the pulse. These results suggest that we may estimate L_c and therefore λ_{min}/α^2 from dynamic slip models that resolve pulse-like propagation ((e.g. Galetzka et al., 2015)). However, it is worth noting for a 3D rough surface L_c may be different, at least in terms of prefactor. Further, other mechanisms can result in the manifestation of slip pulses on faults, such as low-stress conditions (Zheng and Rice, 1998), or linear stability at large wavelengths due to slip to normal stress coupling (Heimisson et al., 2019), which may be responsible for generating the observed pulses in nature. It can be shown, although omitted here, that by including roughness drag in a linearized stability analysis using rate-and-state friction (e.g. Rice et al., 2001), that large wavelengths become stable (although not related to normal stress changes). This also gives a length scale $\propto \lambda_{min}/\alpha^2$, albeit with a different prefactor than L_c.

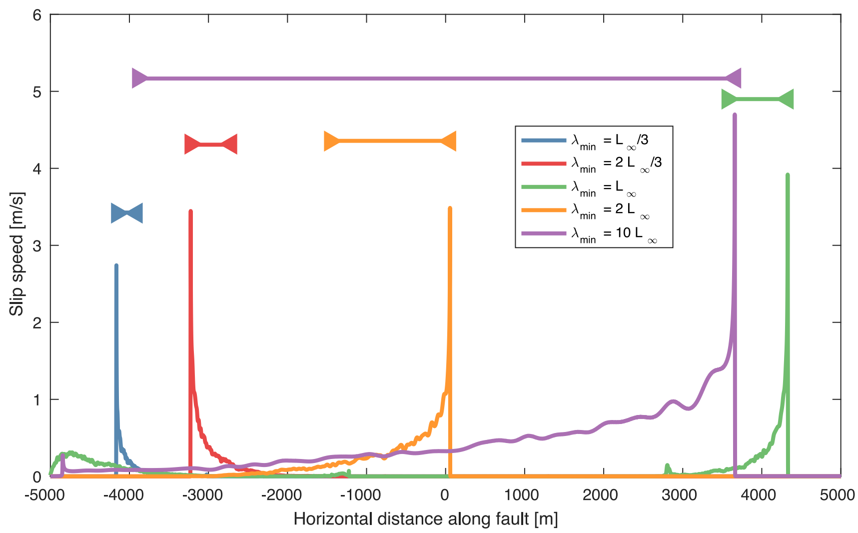

Figure 5: Comparison of L_c (horizontal lines, Eq. 10) to snapshots of slip speeds during pulse-like propagation during each simulation. The figure suggests that L_c is a good measure of a characteristic pulse length.

We may now use details of the rate-and-state friction law to estimate the maximum slip distance during pulse-like propagation. Once pulse reaches a point on the fault, we expect that friction rabidly evolves towards steady-state (Rubin and Ampuero, 2005). Locally the stress drop can be approximated as $\Delta\tau_{RS} \approx (b-a)\sigma_0 \log(V_d/V_0)$, where V_d could be considered a peak slip speed, here we shall take $V_d = 5$ m/s, thus $\log(V_d/V_0) \approx 22.3$. By virtue of the slow growth of the logarithm function, a minor error is introduced even if V_d is an order of magnitude smaller (in which case $\log(V_d/V_0) \approx 20.0$). Equating $\Delta\tau_{RS} = \tau_{drag}$

reveals a maximum slip distance δ_c before we expect roughness drag to prevent further slip

$$\delta_c = \lambda_{min} \frac{1-\nu}{\mu} \frac{(b-a)\sigma_0 \log(V_d/V_0)}{8\pi^3\alpha^2}, \tag{11}$$

which suggests that in a single event, $\delta \lesssim \delta_c$. The corresponding values of δ_c are plotted as black horizontal lines in Figures 2, 3 and 4 for each simulation and show excellent agreement with the slip magnitude in the initial event in all cases where the fault was sufficiently large to manifest the crack to pulse transition properly. The crack to pulse transition reported here resembles the changes in the slip distribution of simple static crack calculations done by Dieterich and Smith (2009) as the crack size was increased. They also reported a maximum slip distance with the same dependence on λ_{min}/α^2 as Eq. 11. However, their formulation included an unknown fitting coefficient, whereas here no fitting is done.

3.2. Seismicity and statistics

As seen in Figures 2, 3 and 4 a single rough or planar fault can host a large distribution of event sizes. In this section, I investigate the characteristics and statistics of the seismicity in each simulation, in particular, the seismic moment distribution.

To extract discrete events from the simulations some assumptions need to be made about the dimension and timing of each event. The following criteria are used for identifying a single event and estimate seismic moment.

1. Identify a time period where the fault continuously slips at any point faster than 10 cm/s.
2. Find points where slip during that time was larger than d_c.
3. Compute the length of rupture and square to get area.
4. Compute the average change in slip where slip exceeded d_c.
5. Compute the seismic moment and magnitude

Clearly squaring the length of a rupture to obtain area is very simplistic and is only valid if the aspect ratio of the ruptures are constant and other 3D effects, such as those that might arise from event interactions, can be ignored. However, this provides a systematic way to compare our in-plane simulations to 3D observations.

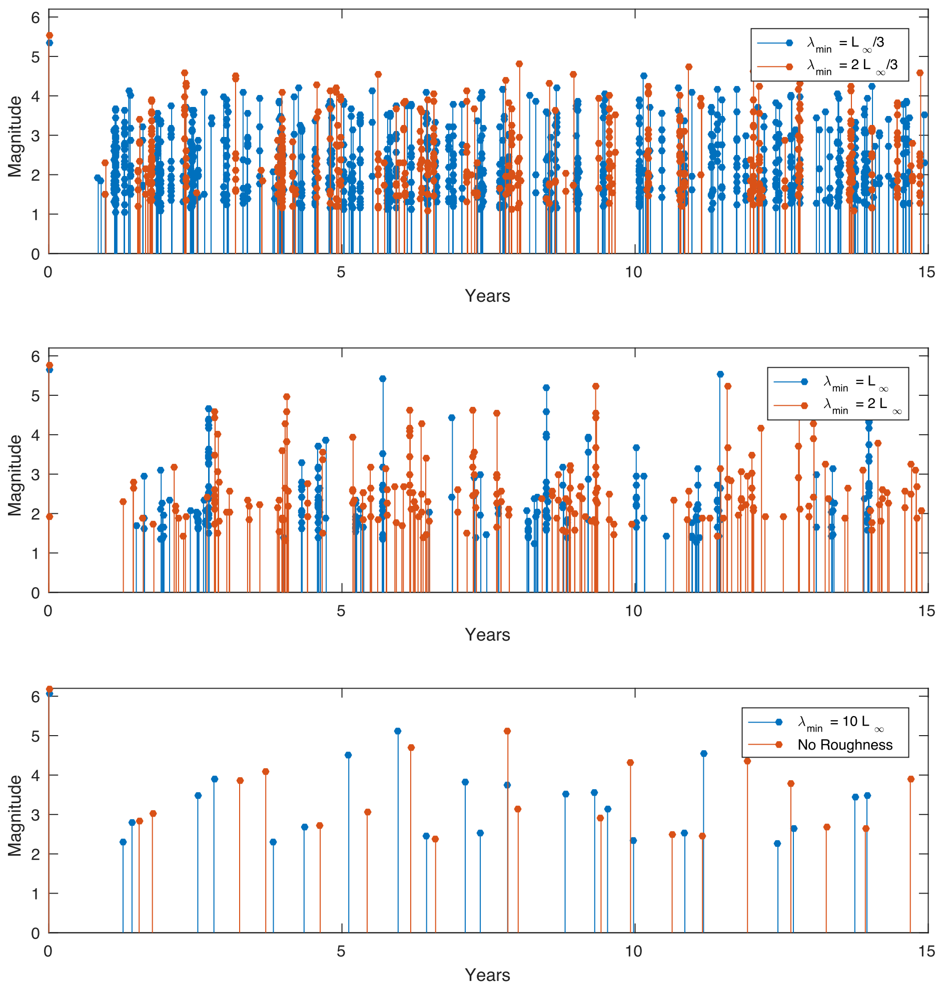

Figure 6: Magnitude versus time in all simulations for the first 15 years of simulations. For small λ_{min}, events are generally smaller and more numerous compared to larger λ_{min} values. Comparison of $\lambda_{min} = 10L_\infty$ and the no-roughness simulation reveals qualitatively similar behavior. The simulations indicated that there is both a maximum and minimum magnitude of events, which change with λ_{min}.

Figure 6 reveals very different frequency and magnitudes of seismicity for cases where λ_{min} is smaller or comparable to L_∞. If $\lambda_{min} \gg L_\infty$, the results suggest that the rough fault and planar fault are qualitatively similar in terms of the frequency, timing, and magnitudes of event. Further, Figure 6 suggests that each simulation has a minimum and maximum moment event. The maximum moment is easy to understand since slip cannot exceed δ_c (Eq. 11), and the fault has a finite length. The minimum moment size is more mysterious since by decreasing λ_{min} the minimum moment also decreased. However, by decreasing λ_{min}, the nucleation dimension should increase, which would imply that the smallest event size should increase (Tal et al., 2018). A possible explanation comes from Eq. 11 where the slip distance is reduced, thus limiting the sizes of the events. That explanation is not fully satisfying since the smallest events in the simulations tend to arrest before reaching a slip distance of δ_c. A more likely explanation may be that due to residual stresses, if λ_{min} is decreased, the normal stress is locally increased at shorter wavelengths and thus locally the nucleation dimension is reduced. This finding highlights the importance of the initial stress in the analysis of earthquake nucleation on rough faults.

If the simulations presented, have any resemblance to earthquakes in nature, we expect that the moment distribution of events to be a power-law. Let us compare the empirical probability distribution function (PDF) to a theoretical moment distribution (Kagan, 2002):

$$\mathrm{PDF}(M) = \frac{M_{max}^{\beta} M_{min}^{\beta}}{M_{max}^{\beta} - M_{min}^{\beta}} \beta M^{-1-\beta}, \text{ where } M_{min} \leq M \leq M_{max}, \quad (12)$$

where M is the moment and $\beta = 2b/3$, with b being the b value of the Gutenberg-Richter distribution, where typically $b \approx 1$. For comparison with simulation we have chosen a truncated moment distribution since we have inferred from Figure 6 that each simulation has both a minimum and maximum moment. Comparison of the theoretical PDF (Eq. 12) and the emipirical PDF determined from each simulation shows that the two are in generally in good agreement for $b = 0.5$ (Figure 7), which well characterizes the fall-off with increased moment. It generally appears λ_{min} does not control the fall-off, but as has been previously noted, the truncation of the distribution is changed by λ_{min}. It is notable that even for the no-roughness limit, the events follow the same power-law distribution. This is consistent with recent work (Cattania, 2019), which showed in simulations and theory that a planar fault that is sufficiently large could manifest a power-law distribution of events (see further discussion in Section 4.1). Some interesting differences are found in Figure 7, when comparing the cases of $\lambda_{min} \lesssim L_\infty$ to $\lambda_{min} = 10L_\infty$ and the no-roughness case. We notice that at low values of moments the empirical distribution has gaps for $\lambda_{min} = 10L_\infty$ and the no-roughness case, whereas all gaps for $\lambda_{min} \lesssim L_\infty$ occur at high moment bins when events are rare. The latter is most likely due to biased sampling. The synthetic catalog includes approximately the maximum event size since it is the first event that occurs (Figure 2, 3 and 4), but due to very numerous small events that increase computational time in these cases, it was not feasible to simulate long enough sequences that would realize these rare events. However, for $\lambda_{min} = 10L_\infty$ and the no-roughness case gaps occur at event sizes that should have been realized in the catalog. For a larger L/L_∞ ratio these gaps might disappear. The gaps in the PDF for a planar fault in Figure 7 are consistent with the bifurcation diagrams by Barbot (2019), which suggest that certain values of intermediate seismic moments do not occur. Based on the results in this paper I hypothesize that rough faults may be ergodic in the sense that if a single simulation is run for long enough events of all possible moments are realized. However, a planar fault simulation will only realize a subset of the distribution of possible moments and are thus not ergodic. I conclude that more study of this topic is needed, in particular in 3D.

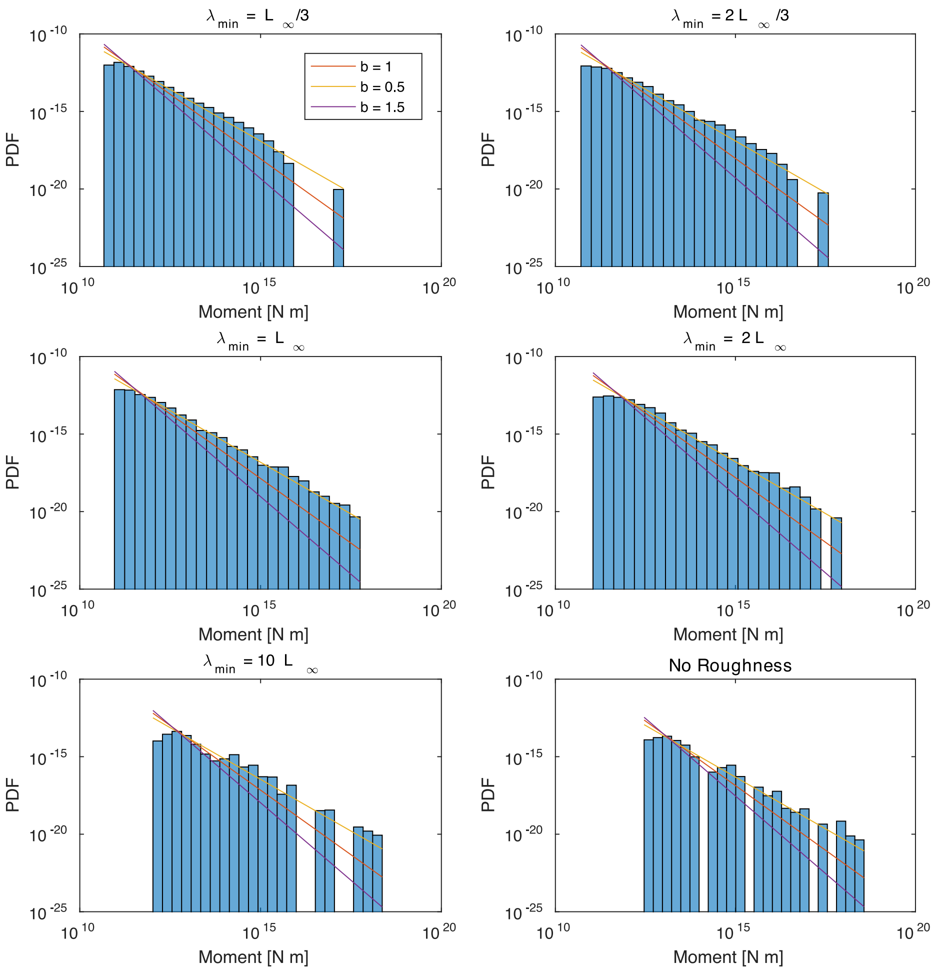

Figure 7: Comparison of Eq. 12 and the empirically estimated moment PDF function. The maximum and minimum moments in Eq. 12 are taken as the observed maximum and minimum moments in the simulations. Eq. 12 is plotted for $b = 0.5, 1, 1.5$, the comparison shows that a good agreement between empirical and theoretical PDFs is found for $b = 0.5$

4. Discussion

4.1. The b value

The b value most consistent with the simulations seems to be $b = 0.5$, which is considerably larger than the typically observed value of $b = 1$ value. The results suggest that the value is not related to the roughness since the same value is found for a planar fault, at least for $H = 1$. Cattania (2019) analyzed an anti-plane fault loaded from below by a creeping velocity strengthening section and bounded from above by a free surface. Through theoretical considerations of simple crack models, she argued $b = 3/4$, which was supported by simulations. This value is also somewhat larger than typically observed. Cattania (2019) squared the rupture lengths to attain an area, as was done here. The simplistic treatment of 3D effect is thus not the source of the difference, although it may factor into what value of b is determined from the simulations. The main difference in this study compared to Cattania (2019) is in the fault loading, here I have simulated a finite in-plane fault that is loaded using backslip, whereas Cattania (2019) loaded by deep creep and stress build-up at the top was prevented by a free surface. I suggest that the difference in loading is likely the cause of the difference in b value, but I conclude that this issue needs further attention since it may provide insight into the physical interpretation of b.

4.2. The backslip approach

The backslip approach to loading and dissipating stresses is a very efficient way of simulating earthquake cycles for geometrically complex faults. One can argue that stresses on and off faults in the earth must dissipate on average over multiple cycles at the same rate as the stresses build-up due to loading. Otherwise, stress accumulation would diverge. The backslip approach achieves this balance. However, the transient temporal and spatial evolution of the stresses may not be as expected from a more rigorous model that considers off-fault plasticity using a continuum model of plasticity (e.g. Dunham et al., 2011b,a; Shi and Day, 2013). However, such continuum plasticity models may not be able to accurately represent an important source of dissipation that occurs off the main fault on discrete structures such as fault branches (Ma and Elbanna, 2019). Further developments of earthquake cycle simulations are needed before we can efficiently simulate multiple cycles on rough faults with realistic stress dissipation mechanisms; in the meantime, backslip offers a simple way to investigate these problems.

5. Conclusions

Roughness has an important influence on both individual ruptures and frequency and magnitude characteristic of events. Events start as crack-like ruptures, but due to roughness drag, they transition to pulse-like ruptures at a characteristic length-scale determined by fault roughness alone and not frictional properties or material constants (Eq. 10). Pulses lock in approximately spatially fixed slip distance (Eq. 11), which depends on the assumed friction law and material properties. Fault roughness thus offers a plausible mechanism for earthquakes to transition from cracks to pulses as they grow. I find that decreasing λ_{min}, decreases both the maximum and minimum event sizes observed in the cycle simulations, however, does not appear to alter the inferred b values which remains the same even for a reference simulation using a planar fault. Much more numerous small events thus characterize simulations with small λ_{min} compared to large λ_{min} simulation or planar fault simulations. The first event in the simulations always ruptures the entire fault, but following events are generally smaller partial ruptures. This difference suggests that the residual stresses induced by fault roughness are paramount in determining subsequent events sizes. Caution is needed when selecting the initial stress distribution for single rupture models on rough faults since it may significantly influence event sizes. Finally, I've hypothesized that sufficiently rough faults are ergodic, but planar faults are not, in the sense that a rough fault simulation if run for long enough will manifest all possible events sizes, but a planar fault will only manifest a subset of event sizes.

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