

# Molecular dynamics simulation of the full operation cycle of a HfO<sub>2</sub>-based RRAM cell

X. Cartoixa<sup>\*</sup>, M. L. Urquiza<sup>\*†</sup>, Md M. Islam<sup>‡</sup>, A. C. T. van Duin<sup>§</sup>, and A. Strachan<sup>¶</sup>

<sup>\*</sup>Departament d'Enginyeria Electrònica, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona,  
08193 Bellaterra (Barcelona), Spain, e-mail: Xavier.Cartoixa@uab.es

<sup>†</sup>Laboratoire des Solides Irradiés, École Polytechnique, Institut Polytechnique de Paris, Paris, France

<sup>‡</sup>Department of Mechanical Engineering, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan 48202, USA

<sup>§</sup>Department of Mechanical Engineering, Pennsylvania State University,  
240 Research East Building, University Park Pennsylvania 16802, USA

<sup>¶</sup>School of Materials Engineering, Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana 47907 USA

Resistive random access memories (RRAMs) are considered the most promising candidates for next generation, high-scaling, ultrafast, and low power consumption memories. RRAM cells, that typically consist of a metal-insulator-metal (MIM) stack, store bits by reversibly changing the resistivity of the insulator between a high resistance state (HRS) and a low resistance state (LRS). In order to enable this reversible change, the devices normally require an initial and irreversible process called electroforming, which is basically a current-controlled breakdown of the pristine highly resistive oxide layer [1].

In most RRAM devices, the switching between LRS/HRS originates from the formation/rupture of a nanoscale conductive filament (CF) in the dielectric layer. In the valence change mechanism (VCM) of operation, a variation in local stoichiometry arising from the presence of oxygen vacancies changes the valence of the metallic ions rendering them conductive [1].

In this contribution we present molecular dynamics (MD) simulations of a HfO<sub>2</sub>-based RRAM cell evolving in time under the influence of a changing external bias, in order to obtain atomistic information of the filament formation and rupture dynamics during all the stages of operation of the RRAM cell [2]. Our simulations explicitly capture all the relevant processes involved in the switching of the device, including redox reactions, oxygen migration, growth of vacancy-rich regions and the effect of temperature. We studied cells with metallic Hf as AE and our simulations reproduce the substoichiometric layer generated at the oxide/AE interface

during the fabrication of the devices. A detailed, 3D, analysis of the motion of O ions during forming, reset, and set reveal unexpected phenomena. During forming, net oxygen migration towards the active electrode dominates the formation of the CF. Our results support the viewpoint that the filament rupture during reset is governed by lateral oxygen migration, induced by the complex 3D electric fields from the neighboring ions and irregular electrode shape during reverse in the bipolar case, or by effect of temperature under unipolar operating conditions. Finally, simulations of the set process demonstrate negligible vertical oxygen migration, in contrast to the forming process, and the filament forms by the rearrangement of oxygen atoms in the lateral directions.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

M.L.U and X.C. acknowledge financial support by the Spanish Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovación under Grants No. RTI2018-097876-B-C21 (MCIU/AEI/FEDER, UE) and No. PID2021-127840NB-I00 (MICINN/AEI/FEDER, UE). Computational support from nanoHUB and Purdue University is gratefully acknowledged.

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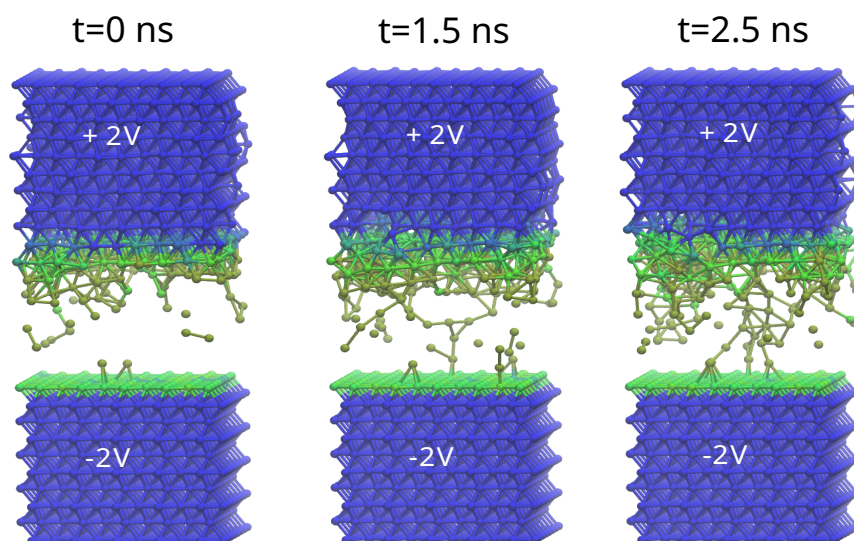


Fig. 1. Snapshots of filament formation during *forming*. Adapted with permission from M. .L. Urquiza et al., ACS Nano vol. 15, 12945 (2021).

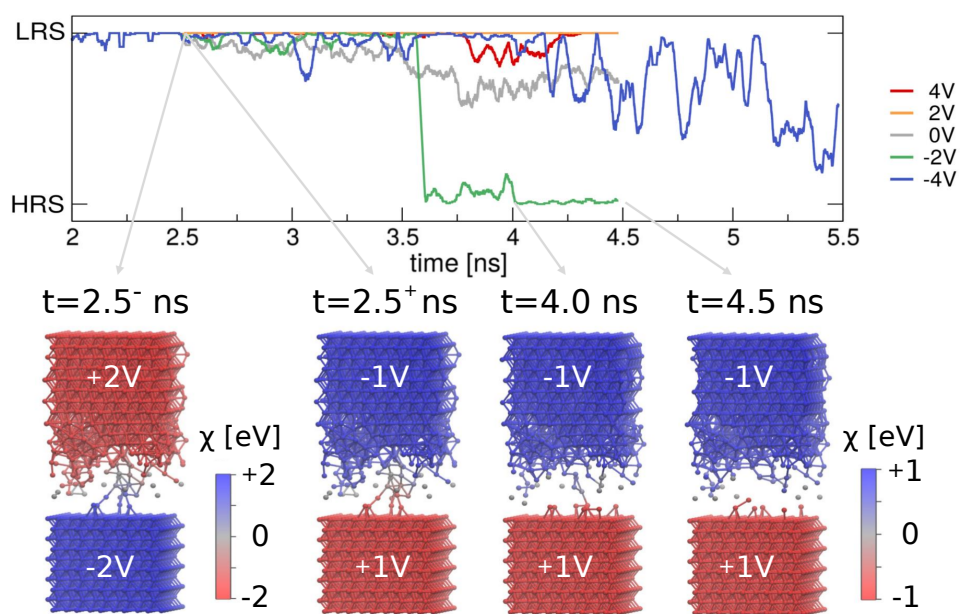


Fig. 2. Snapshots of filament rupture during *reset*. Reproduced with permission from M. .L. Urquiza et al., ACS Nano vol. 15, 12945 (2021).