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Leakage-Reduction Design Concepts for Low-Power Vertical Tunneling Field-Effect Transistors

Samarth Agarwal, Gerhard Klimeck, and Mathieu Luisier

***Abstract*—Using an atomistic full-band quantum transport solver, we investigate the performances of vertical band-to-band tunneling FETs (TFETs) whose operation is based on the enhancement of the gate-induced drain leakage mechanism of MOSFETs, and we compare them to lateral p-i-n devices. Although the vertical TFETs offer larger tunneling areas and therefore larger ON currents than their lateral counterparts, they suffer from lateral source-to-drain tunneling leakage away from the gate contact. We propose a design improvement to reduce the OFF current of the vertical TFETs, maintain large ON currents, and provide steep subthreshold slopes.**

***Index Terms*—Band-to-band tunneling transistors, full-band and atomistic quantum transport, steep subthreshold.**

I. Introduction

BAND-TO-BAND tunneling FETs (TFETs) are emerging as an attractive alternative to MOSFETs in reducing the power consumption of integrated circuits. While the subthreshold slope (SS) of conventional MOSFETs is fundamentally limited to 60 mV/dec at room temperature, in TFETs, the cold injection of valence band (VB) electrons from a source contact into the conduction band (CB) of a drain contact does not impose any lower limit on the SS. Although an SS lower than 60 mV/dec has been demonstrated for lateral TFETs based on carbon nanotube [1], silicon [2], and strained germanium [3] devices, all these approaches suffer from low-ON currents, typically a few microamperes per micrometer, when more than 1,000 μA/μm is required [4].

Atomistic full-band transport simulations indicate that lateral p-i-n TFETs made of a homogeneous material are not capable of providing large enough ON currents, even with a low direct band gap such as InSb and a perfect electrostatic control of the channel as gate-all-around nanowires [5], [6]. The ON-current limitation of lateral TFETs originates from their small tunneling area limited to the device cross section. By switching the tunneling mechanism to a vertical approach characterized by an enhancement of the gate-induced drain leakage present in MOSFETs, it is possible to increase the tunneling area of TFETs proportionally to their gate length and to obtain large ON currents. Such a vertical TFET design has been recently proposed [7]–[9] and named "green FET" (gFET) for its potential to reduce the supply voltage of transistors.

Using the atomistic simulation approach described in Section II, we show in this letter that the gFETs offer larger ON currents than lateral devices but suffer from lateral source-to-drain tunneling leakage away from the gate contact. This effect has never been analyzed before, although it increases the gFET OFF current by several orders of magnitude and makes any steep SS impossible. We therefore propose a design modification to suppress the source-to-drain tunneling leakage in vertical TFETs without affecting their ON current. We further demonstrate using an InAs device that very good performances can be obtained by optimizing the gFET structure.

II. Simulation Approach and Results

The InAs lateral and vertical TFETs considered in this letter are simulated using an atomistic full-band quantum transport solver based on the sp^3s^* nearest-neighbor tight-binding method and a wave function approach [5], [10]. Transport is treated in the ballistic limit, and electron-phonon scattering is not included. The InAs tight-binding parameters are taken from [11]. For computational reasons, spin-orbit coupling is neglected, which does not alter our conclusions [5]. Gate leakage currents are also neglected in this letter.

The tight-binding model accurately and simultaneously describes the CB and VB of most semiconductor materials, as well as the imaginary bands coupling them which is responsible for tunneling. Contrary to standard TFET simulators where tunneling is treated as a perturbation in the WKB approximation [12] and only exists in predefined regions, our approach is characterized by a global tunneling model (tunneling is present everywhere by default). Hence, it is not necessary to specify the regions where tunneling is expected to take place, and no crucial tunneling path is omitted.

TFETs are usually based on lateral band-to-band tunneling of electrons from a p^+ source into a n^+ drain, as shown in Fig. 1(a). An increase of the gate voltage pushes down the CB edge of the device channel below the VB edge of the source and opens a bias-dependent tunneling window at the source/channel interface, as shown in Fig. 1(b). The fact that the electrostatic control of the channel diminishes deep into the device body and does not go beyond a few nanometers puts a restriction on the cross-sectional area available for tunneling and on the highest achievable ON current.

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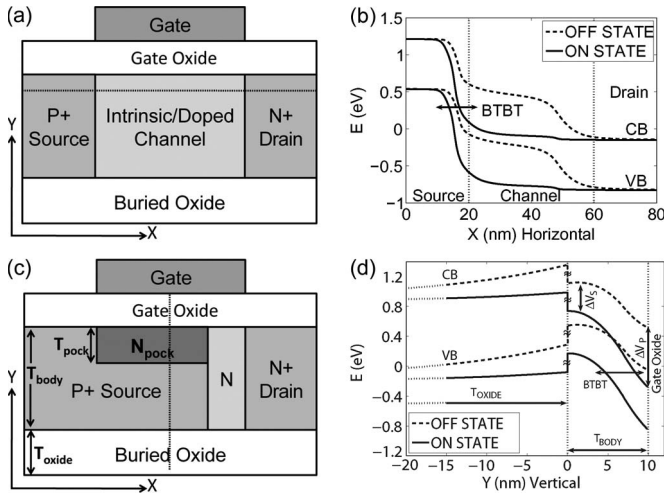

Fig. 1. (a) Lateral p-i-n single-gate TFET. (b) CB and VB edges of the p-i-n device in its (dashed lines) OFF- and (solid lines) ON-states along the horizontal dashed line in (a). (c) Single-gate gFET structure as proposed in [7]. (d) CB and VB edges of the gFET in its OFF- and ON- states along the vertical dashed line in (c). The buried oxide extends from −50 to 0 nm, but only the 20 nm close to the semiconductor channel is shown here.

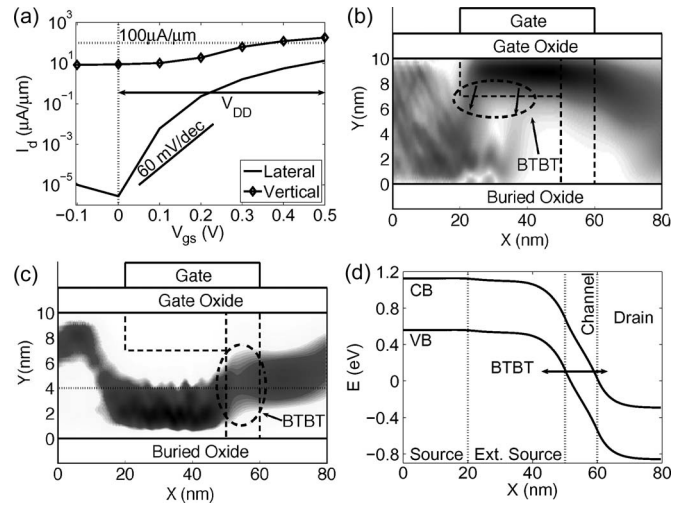

Fig. 2. (a) Transfer characteristics I_d–$V_{\rm gs}$ at $V_{\rm ds} = 0.5$ V of (solid line) a lateral p-i-n TFET and (line with symbols) a vertical gFET, with $L_g = 40$ nm and EOT $= 0.5$ nm. (b) Spatial distribution of the gFET ON current. High-current-density regions appear darker. (c) Same with (b) but for the OFF current. For clarity, a different color scale is used. (d) CB and VB edges of the gFET OFF-state on the horizontal line below the n^+ pocket at $y = 4$ nm in (c).

The vertically tunneling gFET structure, as shown in Fig. 1(c), keeps the p^+ source and n^+ drain of the lateral device, but the source extends close to the drain contact, and both regions are separated only by a lightly n-doped layer. A thin and highly n-doped region called "pocket" is implanted just below the gate contact in the p^+ extended source. Tunneling occurs under the gate region, between the VB electrons of the p^+ extended source and the available confined CB states of the n^+ pocket, as shown in Fig. 1(d). A gate voltage increase moves down the CB edge of the pocket below the VB edge of the extended source and opens a vertical tunneling channel whose area is proportional to the gate length.

Fig. 2(a) compares the transfer characteristics I_d–$V_{\rm gs}$ at $V_{\rm ds} = 0.5$ V of a single-gate InAs lateral p-i-n TFET and a single-gate InAs gFET. Both devices have the same gate length $L_g = 40$ nm, equivalent oxide thickness EOT $= 0.5$ nm, supply voltage $V_{\rm DD} = 0.5$ V, and source and drain doping ($N_A = 2 \times 10^{19}$ cm^{-3}, $N_D = 2 \times 10^{19}$ cm^{-3}). The lateral device has a body thickness of 5 nm to maintain a good electrostatic control of the channel, while the gFET has $T_{\rm body} = 10$ nm, $T_{\rm pock} = 5$ nm, and $N_{\rm pock} = 2 \times 10^{19}$ cm^{-3}, and the n doping of the 5-nm layer between the source and the drain is 10^{18} cm^{-3}.

As expected, the ON current ($I_{\rm ON} = I_d$ at $V_{\rm gs} = V_{\rm ds} = V_{\rm DD}$) is much larger for the gFET (180 μA/μm) than for the p-i-n lateral TFET (14 μA/μm), but it is still well below the ITRS requirement. The spatial distribution of the gFET ON current is shown in Fig. 2(b). It can be observed that vertical band-to-band tunneling occurs between the extended source and the pocket, but the tunneling current is not homogeneously distributed, and two main channels (arrows) can be distinguished. This is due to the profiles of the CB and VB edges that vary along the x-axis, while they should ideally remain constant.

The detrimental characteristics of the gFET is its very high OFF current ($I_{\rm OFF} = I_d$ at $V_{\rm gs} = 0$ V and $V_{\rm ds} = V_{\rm DD}$) that has never been reported before [7]–[9], and whose spatial distribution is shown in Fig. 2(c). A lateral leakage current flowing between the n^+ pocket and the buried oxide can be identified. Fig. 2(d) describes the band diagram of the region where the OFF current flows. It looks like a lateral p-i-n structure that the gate cannot control due to its distance. VB electrons laterally tunnel from the extended source into the drain contact and increase $I_{\rm OFF}$. The gFET, as shown in Fig. 1(c), is therefore unsuitable for low-power logic applications.

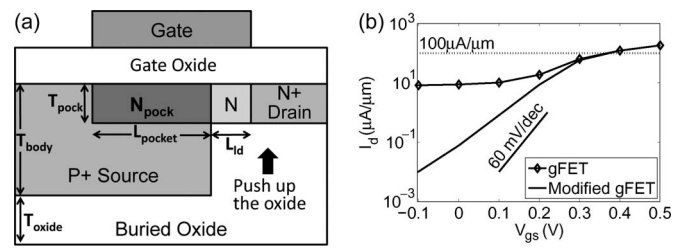

Fig. 3. (a) Modified gFET design. The buried oxide is raised to the height of the pocket in the drain and in the lightly doped channel region. (b) Comparison of the transfer characteristics I_d–$V_{\rm gs}$ at $V_{\rm ds} = 0.5$ V for (line with symbols) the "conventional" and (solid line) the modified gFET design.

To address the large OFF-current issue, we propose a modification of the gFET design in Fig. 3(a). The spatial distribution of the OFF current in Fig. 2(c) shows that the VB electrons originating from the extended source are collected in a portion of the drain contact that is not active in the ON-state shown in Fig. 2(b). The buried oxide below the drain and the lightly n-doped channel are therefore pushed up to the height of the pocket in the drain and lightly n-doped channel such that it blocks any lateral tunneling current pathway. The transfer characteristics of the "original" and modified gFETs are compared in Fig. 3(b), demonstrating that $I_{\rm OFF}$ is reduced by several orders of magnitude without affecting $I_{\rm ON}$.

The gFET ON current and SS must also be improved by optimizing the body thickness $T_{\rm body}$, pocket length $L_{\rm pocket}$, width $T_{\rm pock}$, and doping $N_{\rm pock}$ in Fig. 3(a). Fig. 4(a) shows the effect of the pocket length $L_{\rm pocket}$ on the gFET I_d–$V_{\rm gs}$.

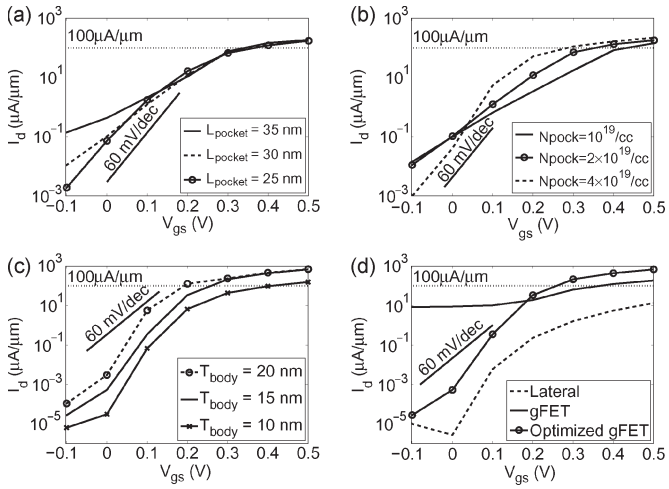

Fig. 4. Transfer characteristics I_d–$V_{\rm gs}$ of different gFET designs. (a) Variation of the pocket length $L_{\rm pocket}$ at a constant gate length $L_g = 40$ nm. (b) Variation of the pocket doping $N_{\rm pock}$. (c) Variation of the body thickness $T_{\rm body}$. (d) Comparison of (line with circles) the optimized InAs gFET with (solid line) the original gFET design and (dashed line) the lateral p-i-n TFET.

A decrease in $L_{\rm pocket}$ and an increase in $L_{\rm ld}$ ($L_g = L_{\rm pocket} + L_{\rm ld}$ remains constant) lead to a further reduction of the gFET OFF current and of the SS. Although the raising of the buried oxide below the drain contact suppressed most of the source-to-drain leakage currents, some diagonal paths joining the extended source and the drain contact persisted. Increasing $L_{\rm ld}$ makes these tunneling paths longer and reduces $I_{\rm OFF}$ and SS. However, the tunneling ON current, which is roughly proportional to $L_{\rm pocket}$, slightly decreases (about 10% reduction for $L_{\rm pocket}$ going from 35 to 25 nm).

Increasing the pocket doping $N_{\rm pock}$, as described in Fig. 4(b), induces larger vertical electric fields so that the tunneling length between the p^+ extended source and the n^+ pocket becomes smaller, the current magnitude becomes larger, and the SS becomes steeper. Hence, SS reduces here from 118 mV/dec for $N_{\rm pock} = 10^{19}$ cm^{-3} to 47 mV/dec for $N_{\rm pock} = 4 \times 10^{19}$ cm^{-3}, while $I_{\rm ON}$ increases from 143 to 220 μA/μm. Similarly, a reduction on $T_{\rm pock}$ improves $I_{\rm ON}$ and SS.

The influence of the body thickness is investigated in Fig. 4(c). As shown in Fig. 1(d), an increase of the gate voltage pushes down the bands not only close to the gate contact in the pocket region, as desired (energy shift labeled ΔV_p), but also deeper in the p^+ extended source (ΔV_s). Of course, $\Delta V_s < \Delta V_p$ since the gate control decreases as a function of the distance, but ideally, ΔV_s should be as small as possible to maximize the electric field between the pocket and the extended source and the tunneling current. Increasing $T_{\rm body}$ from 10 to 15 nm helps reduce ΔV_s and increase $I_{\rm ON}$. A further increase to 20 nm does not improve $I_{\rm ON}$.

Finally, Fig. 4(d) shows the best transfer characteristics I_d–$V_{\rm gs}$ at $V_{\rm ds} = 0.5$ V, which could be obtained by optimizing the InAs gFET structure ($T_{\rm body} = 15$ nm, $L_{\rm pocket} = 25$ nm, $T_{\rm pock} = 3$ nm, $N_{\rm pock} = 4 \times 10^{19}$ cm^{-3}, and $L_g = 40$ nm; all the other parameters remain the same). An intrinsic $I_{\rm ON} = 667$ μA/μm (no contact series resistance), $I_{\rm OFF} = 1{\rm e}-3$ μA/μm, and $SS = 36$ mV/dec are reported for the optimized gFET, which is much better than the original gFET design, and the lateral p-i-n TFET.

III. Conclusion

We have investigated InAs vertical TFETs known as gFETs and compared them to lateral p-i-n devices. Simulation results suggest that the gFET gives a significant gain in the ON current over the lateral tunneling geometries due to an increase of the tunneling area. The original gFET design is still unsuitable for low-power logic applications because of very high OFF currents caused by lateral source-to-drain tunneling. A structure modification and an optimization of the device parameters allow for a reduction of $I_{\rm OFF}$ by several orders of magnitudes, an increase of $I_{\rm ON}$ close to the ITRS requirement, and an SS below the 60-mV/dec limit of MOSFETs.

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