

RISKVI Case Study

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Abstract—RISK-V FPGAs are attracting chip developers worldwide due to their open source and ease of configuration. These FPGAs can be used in space applications. Implementing fast and reliable hardware on nanosatellites had to be tested under extreme circumstances. This report evaluates the impact of the operating system on the reliability of RISC-V based FPGAs against configuration memory upsets.

Index Terms—RISC-V, FPGAs, nanosatellites, configuration memory upsets

I. INTRODUCTION

Field-programmable gate arrays(FPGAs) are becoming attractive for nanosats due to the improvements in performance and in-field reconfigurability of new generations of SRAM-based FPGAs. A nanosat or nanosatellite(Fig. 1) is anything that weighs between 1 and 10 kilograms. They are becoming attractive for space travel due to improvements in performance and in-field reconfigurability compared to traditional computer chips. The software running on the FPGAs is called Embedded Operating System. An Embedded OS is a specialized operating system designed to perform a specific task for a device that is not a computer. The main job of an embedded OS is to run the code that allows the device to do its job, and it makes software development easier. Current operating systems that are quali-

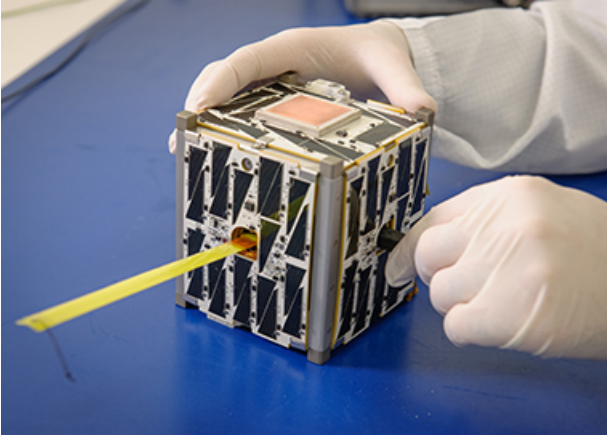


Fig. 1. A real life nanosat.

fied for space missions are generally very costly. Consequently, general-purpose OS-powered nanosat missions, such as Linux systems, have been deployed in the past. Leppinen [1] stated that choosing Linux limits the choice of hardware. Another

major drawback is that Linux is not designed to be a real-time operating system. A real-time operating system is an OS that guarantees real-time applications a certain capability within a specified deadline. In some cases, design changes can reduce the number of hard real-time applications. The remaining constraints require another dedicated controller to handle the real-time problem.

II. BACKGROUND

The reliability of these OSs for a given hardware platform needs to be evaluated before their actual deployment. Wali et al. [2] assessed the effects of the Linux OS on the fault tolerance of applications running on a RISC-V SoC(System on Chip) implemented in a Xilinx FPGA. To address the evaluation of the effects, we need to define the background. Although previous studies analyzed the fault tolerance of OS in embedded platforms, the following report will focus on radiation-induced configuration memory upsets on the reliability of applications running on a Linux RISC-V FPGA. Radiation-induced configuration memory upsets are a type of computer hardware failure caused by exposure to ionizing radiation from space. The radiation can create a charge that alters the state of a memory cell, causing a bit flip when the chip is exposed. It can result in errors in data storage or retrieval. In some cases, it can crash the system.

A. FPGA Fault Injection

The method employed is called FPGA fault injection. It is defined as the validation technique of fault-tolerant systems where the observation of the system's behavior in presence of faults is done explicitly by injecting faults into the system. Reference [2] pointed out that FPGAs are an ideal fault-emulation platform due to their high logic density and reconfigurability. The FPGA consists of two layers, the user layer, and the configuration layer. Partially Modifying the configuration layer can start the injection process. Tawfeek et al. categorized the fault injection technique into three categories in [4]. In our case, we will be using software-based injection. The objective is to inject errors at the software level. The injected error simulates those that may occur due to hardware faults.

III. EXPERIMENT SETUP AND OVERVIEW

The hardware the experiment uses includes an Artix-7 series FPGA from Xilinx Inc. and a host computer.

A. Hardware Setup

Figure 2 shows the block diagram of the hardware setup. The host computer is responsible for the fault injections and the debug software, which communicates with the FPGA's SoC through a debug interface. The interface controls the executions of workload programs, collection of data, logging the errors, and resets the program for the following execution. The

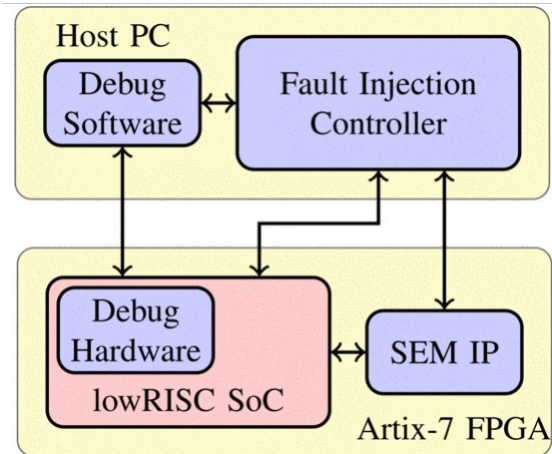


Fig. 2. Block diagram of the fault injection setup.

fault injection controller is located inside the host computer and utilizes Soft Error Mitigation Intellectual Property (SEM IP) to introduce single event upsets (SEUs) into the Artix-7 FPGA's configuration memory. Maillard et al. from Xilinx performed a similar analysis [3] to simulate the impact of radiation on the FPGA, but they utilized a proton beam rather than actual radiation.

B. Benchmarks

The workloads for fault injection consist of five mathematical algorithms: Tower of Hanoi, Dijkstra's algorithm, Matrix multiplication, Quicksort, and Mergesort.

The Tower of Hanoi is a puzzle game that requires moving a stack of disks from one peg to another peg with the assistance of a third peg. The game operates under a set of rules: only one disk can be moved at a time, and a larger disk cannot be placed on top of a smaller disk. The algorithm ensures that the puzzle is solved in the minimum number of moves possible.

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