Cache for HLS

A multi-process architecture

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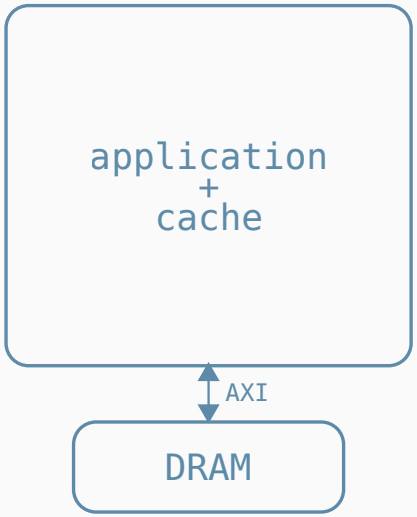
Motivation

- **Problem**:
  big arrays mapped to DRAM $\Rightarrow$ performance bottlenecks
- **Proposed solution**:
  cache module designed to:
  - exploit BRAMs
  - easily integrable into any *Vitis HLS* design

Inlined architecture (Ma Liang)

Array access $\rightarrow$ Inlined cache logic

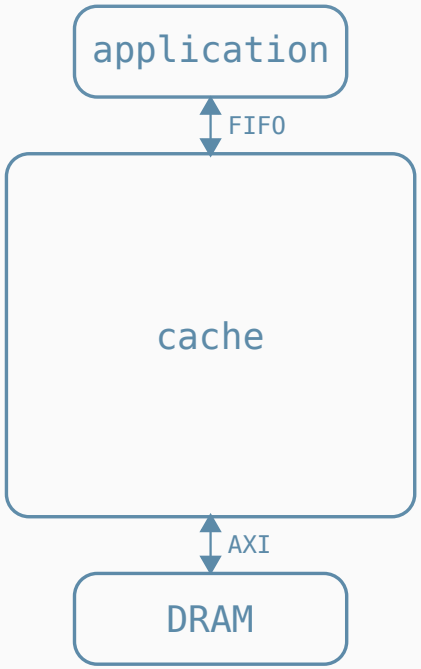
- straightforward architecture
- cache logic mixed with application logic
- single-port only



Multi-process architecture

Array access $\rightarrow$ Request to separate module

- decoupling between application and cache logic (communication through FIFOs)
- may support multiple ports (work in progress)



Tools

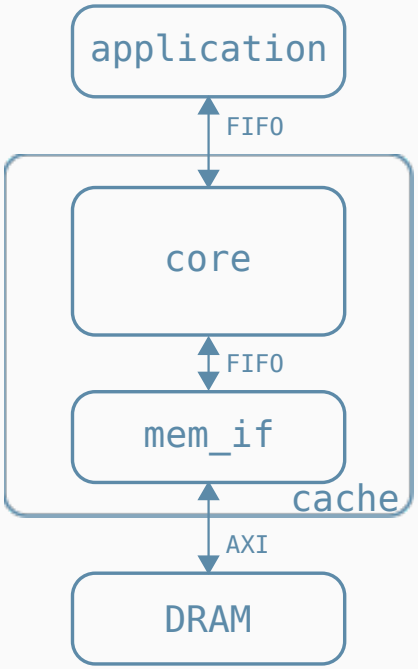
`C++` code coupled with *Vitis HLS* (2020.2) allow:

- **Multiple processes modeling**:
  infinite loops parallelized by:
  - SW simulation: `std::thread`
  - Synthesis: `DATAFLOW` with *start propagation* disabled
- **Inter-process communication**: `hls::stream` FIFOs
- **Performance optimization**:
  - loop pipelining: new request each cycle
  - automatic port widening: access one line at a time in DRAM
- **Customization:** cache characteristics set through `template`
- **Limitations**: cannot override "`[] operator`" for `set` due to automatic `class` disaggregation

Internal architecture

- **Problem**: persuade HLS to schedule cache HIT response early in the pipeline
- **Proposed solution**: split the cache into two processes:
  1. `core`:
     - manage requests from `application`
     - keep cache data structures up-to-date
  2. `mem_if`:
     - manage DRAM accesses

  $\Rightarrow$ synthesizer job is simplified: HIT response scheduled earlier

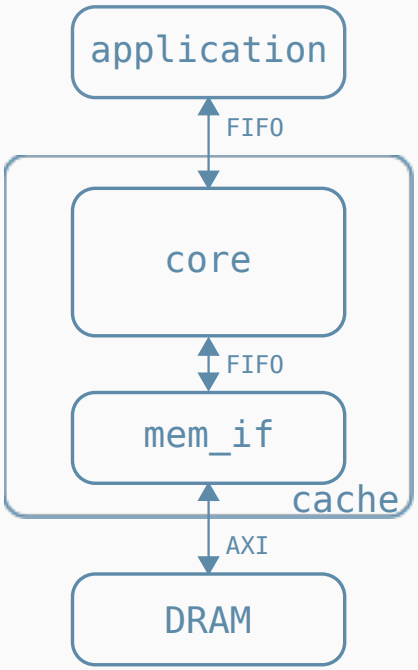


mem_if implementation

Functionality

Manage DRAM accesses:

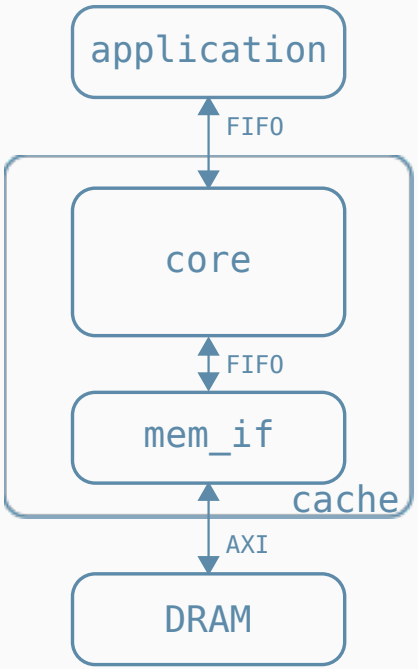
1. read request from core
2. access DRAM
3. write response to core (if read request)



core implementation

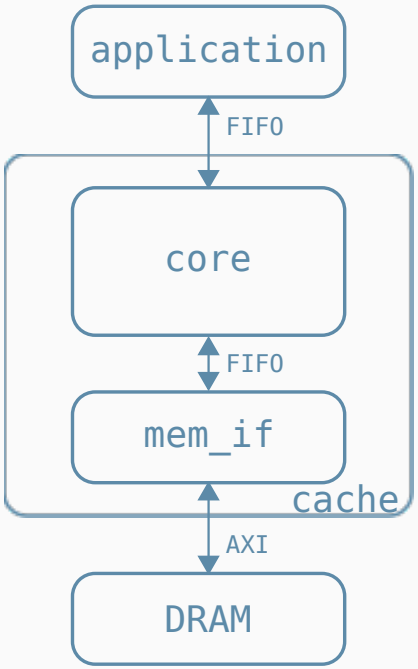
Functionality

1. read request from application
2. check if it is an HIT or a MISS
3. if MISS:
   - if the cache line to be overwritten $\texttt{line}_{old}$ has been modified, issue a write request of $\texttt{line}_{old}$ to mem_if
   - issue a read request of the requested line to mem_if
   - read mem_if response and update BRAM
4. access BRAM
5. write response to application (if read)



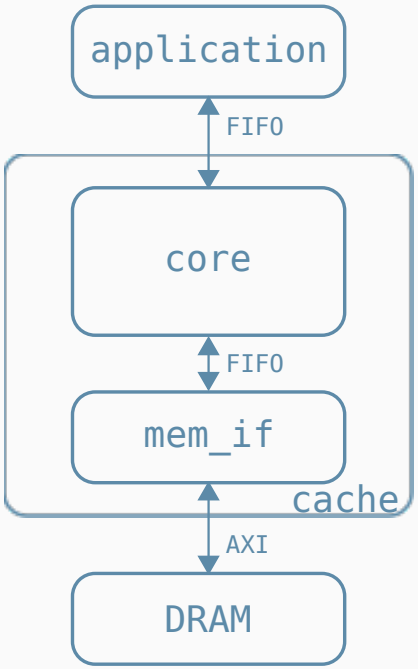
BRAM dependencies - Line loading

- **Problem**: reading BRAM line immediately after it has been loaded from DRAM causes a *Read-After-Write* dependency
- **Proposed solution**: store the `mem_if` response in a buffer which can be immediately accessed and update BRAM afterwards



BRAM dependencies - RAW `request`

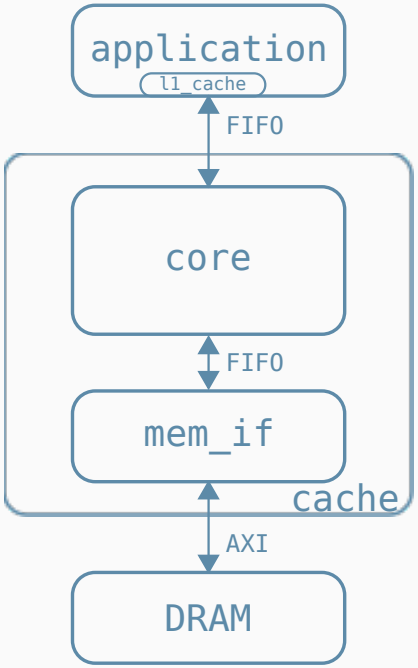
- **Problem**: a `write request` immediately followed by a `read request` to the same element causes a *Read-After-Write* dependency on BRAM
- **Proposed solution**: `raw_cache` inside `cache`:
  - `write` request: store the written line to a buffer
  - subsequent `read` request to the same line: access the buffer instead of BRAM



Request optimization

- **Problem**:
  - each FIFO access costs 1 cycle
  - accesses to arrays are often sequential
- **Proposed solution**: `l1_cache` in the interface (`application` side):
  - `read` request: get the whole cache line, store it in a buffer and return the requested element
  - subsequent `read` request to the same line: access the buffer

  $\Rightarrow$ avoid passing through FIFOs



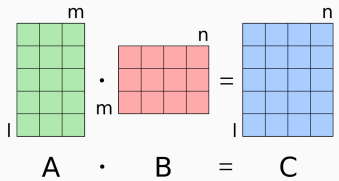
Performance

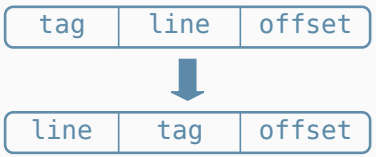
- **Loop pipelining**:
  - `core`: `II=1`
  - `mem_if`: `II=1` when cache line (in bits) is smaller or equal than the maximum AXI interface bitwidth (512 bits), `II=2` otherwise
- **L1 HIT**: latency of 1 cycle
- **HIT**: latency of 6 cycles

Matrix Multiplication

Row-by-column product:

- A and C matrices accessed by rows:
  $hit\_ratio = \frac{line\_size-1}{line\_size}, \forall n\_lines > 0$
- B matrix accessed by columns:
  modified *direct mapped* address mapping:





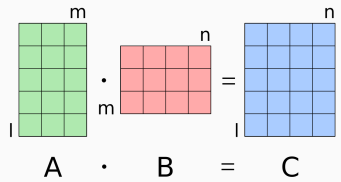
$$\Rightarrow hit\_ratio = \frac{line\_size-1}{line\_size} \Leftrightarrow n\_lines = m$$

Matrix Multiplication

Practical example

- **Problem size**:

$$\begin{cases} l & = 16 \\ m & = 32 \\ n & = 64 \end{cases}$$



- **Caches size**:

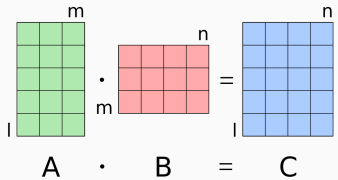
$$\left.\begin{array}{ll} line\_size_i & = 32, \forall i \\ n\_lines_A & = n\_lines_C = 2 \\ n\_lines_B & = m = 32 \end{array}\right\} \Rightarrow hit\_ratio_i = 96.9\%, \forall i$$

Matrix Multiplication

Practical example

- **Execution time without caches**:
  $2,428,745\mu s$
- **Execution time with caches**:
  $1,160,105\mu s$

$\Rightarrow$ performance improved by 52%



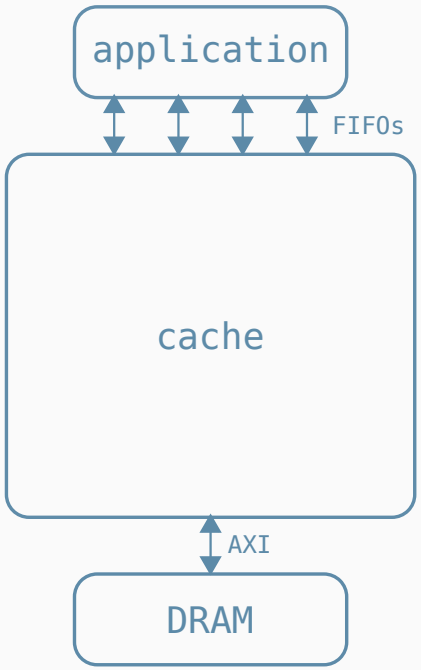
Multi-port cache

- **Problem**: cache manages one request per cycle ⇒ unrolling a loop which uses the cache is not trivial
- **Possible workarounds**: access multiple data elements for each request and do all the unroll in `application`; two possible ways:
  - `get_line`: return a whole cache line
  - pack multiple data elements in a single cache element (e.g. `hls::vector`)
- **Proposed solution**: provide N ports, where N is the unroll factor

Multi-port cache

Implementation

- **Straightforward implementation**:
  - provide N FIFOs on the interface
  - unroll `core` loop by a factor N
- **Problem**: all the N requests may refer to the same line $\rightarrow$ each iteration must wait completion of previous one



Multi-port cache

Implementation

- **Proposed solution**:
  1. read all the N requests
  2. check if they are all HIT
  3. if at least one MISS issue all the requests to `mem_if`
  4. access BRAM
  5. write all the responses
  - cache addressing mode converted to an associative one
  - possibly implement `core` at RTL to have full control on scheduling