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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of a Doctor of Philosophy in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University.

.....**Signature of candidate**.....**day of****2009**

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the loving memory of my late wife, Mrs. Abdulkareem Ajobi Ashiat who passed away on the 12th of March, 2006 and our unborn child; may their souls rest in perfect peace. Your love, support, hospitality and kindness will forever remain in my memory.

To my late Father, Alhaji Ambali Adisa Abdulkareem who passed away on the 20th of May, 2009, may his soul rest in perfect peace. Your love, support, hospitality and kindness will forever remain in my memory.

ABSTRACT

The need for an alternative source of energy is very urgent. The challenges are to develop a new technology that will produce an efficient and environmentally friendly source of energy other than fossil fuel. A fuel cell system especially proton exchange membrane fuel cell is considered the most promising alternative method of converting and exploiting energy with many benefits including low pollutant emission, sustainability and reliability. However, a number of issues need to be resolved before the proton electron membrane fuel can become commercially and technologically viable. These include the durability and the availability of the membrane among many other factors. In this research, Proton Exchange Membrane (PEM) was synthesized by sulphonation of polystyrene butadiene rubber that is readily available in South Africa, using chlorosulphonic acid as the sulphonating agent. The synthesized membrane was blended with carbon nanoballs (CNBs) produced by the swirled floating catalytic chemical fluid deposition (SFCCVD) method designed and conceptualized by Iyuke (2005). Synthesis of carbon nanoparticles with this reactor was optimized using different experimental conditions of pyrolysis temperature, flow rates of acetylene, hydrogen and argon gases. A maximum production rate of 0.35 g/min was obtained at 1000°C, acetylene flow rate of 370 ml/min, hydrogen flow rate of 180 ml/min and a flow ratio of acetylene to hydrogen equal to five. Since clean nanoparticles are required in this work for membrane synthesis, the SFCCVD reactor was modified to synthesize clean carbon nanoballs via a non-catalytic method. The carbon nanoballs produced were used in the formulation of sulphonated polystyrene butadiene rubber–carbon nanoballs composite membrane. The synthesised membranes and the composite membranes were characterized to determine the ion exchange capacity, degree of sulphonation, thermal stability, water uptake,

porosity, proton conductivity, solvent uptake, and morphology and methanol crossover. The characterization of the synthesized membrane for methanol cross over is to determine the suitability of the membrane for possible application in direct methanol fuel cell; however hydrogen fuel is used in this work. The results obtained revealed that the blending of the membrane with CNBs improved the thermal stability, water uptake, porosity, solvent uptake, methanol crossover and proton conductivity of the membrane with more than 50 % increase in proton conductivity. The results of various analyses conducted on the synthesized membrane revealed that the synthesized membrane shows better qualities in terms of thermal stability, solvent uptake, porosity to solvent, methanol crossover and water uptake than Nafion 112, which is the commercially available membrane. The synthesized and composite membranes were sandwiched between two electrodes to produce a membrane electrode assembly (MEA), using the hot press method at constant temperature, pressure and time. The performance of the fabricated MEA was tested in a single PEM fuel cell using hydrogen as the fuel gas and oxygen as oxidant at room temperature (about 25°C). The results obtained revealed that the utilization of sulphonated PSBR resulted in higher performance compared to Nafion 112. Nafion 112 produces a maximum power density of 67 mW/cm² while the membrane synthesized from PSBR generated a maximum power density of 74 mW/cm². This difference is corresponding to about 10% increment. Also the membrane blended with CNBs exhibited a superior performance to a non-blended membrane. The former gives a maximum power density in the range of 74-97 mW/cm² depending on the mass of CNBs. These values are about 7-32 % higher than the non-blended membrane.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

COPYRIGHT	ii
DECLARATION	iii
DEDICATION	iv
ABSTRACT	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	vii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	x
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS	xv
LIST OF FIGURES	xix
LIST OF TABLES	xxiv
CHAPTER ONE	
1.0 Introduction	1
1.1 Background and Motivation	1
1.2 Research Problems	6
1.3 Contribution to Knowledge	8
1.4 Aim and Objectives	9
1.5 Scope of Research	10
1.6 Organization of the Thesis	10
CHAPTER TWO	
2.0 Introduction and background	12
2.1 General Fuel Cell Concepts	17
2.1.1 Types of Fuel Cells	18
2.1.1.1 Alkaline fuel cell	20

2.1.1.2 Molten carbonate fuel cells	22
2.1.1.3 Phosphoric acid fuel cells	24
2.1.1.4 Solid oxide fuel cells	25
2.1.1.5 Proton exchange membrane fuel cell	26
2.2 Thermodynamic of Proton Exchange Fuel Cell	30
2.3 Proton Exchange Membrane	36
2.4 The Membrane Electrode Assembly	40
2.4.1 Fabrication of membrane electrode assembly	45
2.5 Tape Casting	51
2.6 Carbon Nanoballs in the Development of PEM	57
2.8.1 Characterization of carbon nanoballs	60
CHAPTER THREE	
3.0 Experimental work	62
3.1 Synthesis and Characterization of Carbon Nanoballs	64
3.1.1 Non catalytic synthesis of carbon nanoballs	65
3.1.2 X-ray diffraction (XRD) analysis	66
3.1.3 Surface morphology of carbon nanoballs	66
3.1.4 Raman spectroscopy	67
3.2 Proton Exchange Membrane Synthesis	67
3.2.1 Fourier transform infrared and nuclear magnetic resonance (HNMR) studies	68
3.2.2 Thermal analysis	68
3.2.3 Viscosity measurement	68

3.2.4 Ion exchange capacity (IEC) and degree of sulphonation	69
3.3 Casting of Membrane	69
3.3.1 Proton conductivity	70
3.3.2 Water uptake, water desorption and swelling ratio	71
3.3.3 Total solvent uptake and membrane porosity to methanol	72
3.3.4 Methanol permeability in SPSBR	73
3.3.5 Morphology of the rubber	74
3.4 Formulation of Sulphonated Polystyrene Butadiene and Carbon Nanoballs	75
3.5 Membrane Electrode Assembly	75
3.6 MEA Testing in Fuel Cell Stack	76
CHAPTER FOUR	
4.0 Production and Characterization of Carbon Nanoball and other Nanoparticles	78
4.1 Synthesis of Carbon Nanoparticles	79
4.2 Non Catalytic Synthesis of Carbon Nanoballs	87
4.2.1 Effect of acetylene flow rate and temperature on CNBs synthesized	92
CHAPTER FIVE	
5.0 Synthesis of SPSBR Membrane, its Composites and Application	100
5.1 Preliminary investigation	101
5.1.1 Solubility of PSBR	101
5.1.2 Choice of sulphonating agents	102
5.1.3 FT – IR and ¹ HNMR studies	104
5.1.4 Effect of the weight of polymer and sulphonation time	107

5.1.5 FT – IR and ¹ HNMR Studies	110
5.2 Optimization of membrane synthesis	112
5.2.1 Effect of concentration of acid on sulphonation of PSBR	113
5.2.2 Effect of stirring speed	115
5.2.3 Effect of time on sulphonation of PSBR	117
5.2.3.1 FT- IR analysis of effect of time on sulphonation of SPBR	121
5.2.4 Effect of temperature on sulphonation of SPBR	123
5.3 Blending of SPSBR with carbon nanoballs	125
5.4 Characterization of the synthesized membrane	127
5.4.1 Morphological study of PSBR and SPSBR using SEM	127
5.4.2 Problem of brittleness with SPBR	131
5.4.3 Thermal stability	132
5.4.4 Water uptake and water desorption capacity of the membrane	141
5.4.5 Proton conductivity	149
5.4.6 Porosity and total solvent uptake	159
5.4.7 Methanol crossover	164
5.5 MEA fabrication and testing	175
5.6 Conclusion	183
CHAPTER SIX	
6.0 Conclusions and Recommendations	188
6.1 Conclusions	188

6.2 Recommendations	190
REFERENCES	191
APPENDIX 1	
Table of results	240
APPENDIX 2	
List of publications	253

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

Abbreviation

A	Tafel constant
AC	Alternate current
AFC	Alkaline Fuel Cell
BET	Brunauer, Emmett and Teller
BPS	Ballard Power System
CCVD	Catalytic chemical vapour deposition
CNBs	Carbon nanoballs
CNTs	Carbon Nanotubes
CSs	Carbon spheres
CVD	Chemical vapour deposition
DC	Direct current
DS	Degree of sulphonation
DMFC	Direct Methanol Fuel Cells
DOE	Department of Energy
DWCNT	Double walled carbon nanotubes
E (or V)	Cell potential
E^0	Open cell voltage
EDX	Energy Dispersive X-ray Analysis
EW	Equivalent weight
F	Faraday constant

fcc	Face centered cubic
FT IR	Fourier transformation infrared
FWHM	Full width at half – maximum
GDL	Gas diffusion layer
HP	Horse power
HRTEM	High–resolution transmission electron microscope
IEC	Ion exchange capacity
IEMFCs	Ion Exchange Membrane Fuel Cells
IFC	International fuel cells
i	Current density
io	Exchange current density
kW	kiloWatt
MCFC	Molten Carbonate Fuel Cells
MEA	Membrane Electrode Assembly
mV	millivolts
MWCNTs	Multi–Walled Carbon Nanotubes
NASA	National Aeronautics and Space Administration
NNI	National Nanotechnology Initiative
ORR	oxygen reduction reaction
PEM	Proton Exchange Membrane
P	Pressure of the gas
P ⁰	Standard pressure

PEMFC	Proton Exchange Membrane Fuel Cell
PEMFC	Polymer Electrolyte Membrane Fuel Cell
PFSI	perfluorosulphonated ionomer
PPV	Poly-p-phenylene vinylene
PSBR	Polystyrene butadiene rubber
PTFE	Polytetrafluoroethylene
PXRD	Powder X-ray diffraction
ppm	parts per million
ppm/s	parts per million per second
R	Universal gas constant
R_T	Total ohmic resistance
R_M	Ionic resistance of membrane
R_{ec}	Electronic resistance electrode
R_i	Ionic resistance of MEA
RFC	Regenerative Fuel Cells
RS	Raman Spectrometer
S	Surface area of membrane
Sc	Sulphur content
SEM	Scanning Electron Microscopy
SiNWs	Silicon nanowires
SFCCVD	Swirled floating chemical vapour deposition
SOFC	Solid oxide fuel cells
SPEFCs	Solid polymer electrolyte fuel cells

SPBSR	Sulphonated polystyrene butadiene rubber
STM	Scanning tunneling microscope
SWCNTs	Single-walled carbon nanotubes
T	Temperature
TEM	Transmission electron microscopy
TGA	Thermo-gravimetry analysis
TPR	Temperature programmed reduction
US	United States
mV	milliVolts
V	voltage (or Volts)
V-I	voltage-current
UV	Ultra violet
XRD	X-ray diffraction

Greek

η	Efficiency
δ_f	Fuel utilization coefficient
ΔG_f	Gibbs free energy
a	Associated activity
Φ	Relative humidity of air
σ	Proton conductivity
ε	Membrane porosity to methanol
λ_{total}	Overall uptake of solvent molecules

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1.1 Chemical structure of Nafion	4
2.1 Basic Fuel Cell Components	18
2.2 Alkali fuel cell	21
2.3 Molten Carbonate Fuel Cell	23
2.4 Phosphoric Acid Fuel Cell	24
2.5 Solid Oxide Fuel Cell	26
2.6 Proton Exchange Membrane Fuel Cell	29
2.7 Direct Methanol Fuel cell	30
2.8 Energy inputs and outputs	31
2.9 I-V Characteristic of fuel cell showing various losses	34
2.10 Schematic of Membrane Electrode Assembly	41
2.11 Tape Casting Machine	52
2.12 Stages involved in the processing of tape casting	54
2.13 Process flow chart of tape casting of PSBR	56
2.14 Chemical catalytic vapour deposition equipment	59
3.1 Flow diagram of various analyses conducted on synthesis of PEM	63
3.2 Schematic of a swirled floating catalytic chemical vapour deposition reactor	65
3.3 Laboratory scale tape caster	70
3.4 Schematic of methanol crossover setup	74
3.4 Hot press machine	75

4.1 TEM images of CNPs synthesized with SFCCVD at various conditions	81
4.2 TEM images of pure CNBs produced at (a) 900°C, C ₂ H ₂ = 370 ml/min	83
4.3 TGA profile of CNPs in oxidizing air (atmosphere)	84
4.4 Ramman spectrometer of CNPs sample	85
4.5 XRD pattern of CNPs sample	86
4.6 TEM image of carbon nanoballs produced by the SFCCVD technique at (a) 900°C (c) 950°C (e) 1000°C with C ₂ H ₂ gas flow rate of 118 ml min ⁻¹ , (b, d f) Corresponding HMTEM image of the carbon nanoballs	89
4.7 TGA profile of carbon nanoballs in an oxidizing (air) atmosphere	91
4.8 HMTEM image of carbon nanoballs after heating at 800°C under nitrogen flow	92
4.9 Rate of carbon nanoballs production at different temperatures and flow rate of acetylene	93
4.10 Effects of carrier gas on rate of carbon nanoballs production at constant flow rate of acetylene and temperature	95
4.11 (a-c) TEM images of carbon nanoballs synthesized with Ar as carrier gas at a) 487 ml min ⁻¹ , b) 248 ml min ⁻¹ , and c) 70 ml min ⁻¹ . Histograms for the corresponding size distributions of the carbon nanoballs are shown on the right of the TEM images	96
4.12 PXRD patterns of carbon nanoballs synthesized using the SFCCVD technique	97
4.13 Raman spectra of carbon nanoballs	98
4.14 Raman spectra of carbon nanoballs after heat treatment	99
5.1 HNMR at different sulphonating agents	106

5.2 IR spectra at different sulphonating agents	107
5.3 IR spectra of the sulphonated rubber at different of degree of sulphonation	111
5.4 ¹ HNMR spectra of: Unsulphonated PSBR and Sulphonated PSBR	112
5.5 SEM images of excess concentration of chlorosulphonic acid	114
5.6 Relationship between ion exchange capacity, degree of sulphonation and viscosity	115
5.7 Effect of stirring speed on sulphonation of PSBR	116
5.8 Effect of sulphonation time on IEC and DS	118
5.9 Degree of sulphonation and viscosity as a function of optimum reaction time	119
5.10 effects of DS and IEC on viscosity of SPSBR	120
5.11 IR spectra of SPSBR	122
5.12 Effects of temperature on IEC of the sulphonated rubber	123
5.13 Effects of temperature DS of sulphonated rubber	124
5.14 SEM images of SPSBR	128
5.15 Morphology of sulphonated polystyrene butadiene rubber blended with carbon nanoballs	129
5.16 SEM micrographs of the membrane composites	130
5.17 SEM images at different degree of sulphonation	132
5.18 DSC curves of the unsulphonated and sulphonated rubber at different sulphonation time	134
5.19 DSC curves of the unsulphonated and sulphonated rubber at different degree of sulphonation	135
5.20 TGA curve of the unsulphonated and sulphonated rubber	

at different degree of sulphonation	136
5.21 TGA curve of the unsulphonated and sulphonated rubber	
at different sulphonation time	138
5.22 Experimental and Theoretical Degree of sulphonation	
at different concentration of acid	139
5.23 Differential thermal curve of sulphonated and unsulphonated	
polystyrene butadiene rubber at different sulphonation time	140
5.24 TGA profile of the SPSBR/CNBs composite membranes	
at different mass of blended CNBs	141
5.25 Water uptake at different degree of sulphonation	143
5.26 Water uptake at different membrane thickness	144
5.27 Effects of carbon nanoballs on the water uptake of the composite membrane	146
5.28 Effect of temperature and membrane thickness on water uptake and swelling ratio	148
5.29 Protons conductivity of the membrane at different degree of sulphonation	
and temperature	151
5.30 Effect of membrane thickness on the proton conductivity	
conductivity of the membrane at different degree of sulphonation	152
5.31 Effect of CNBs on the proton conductivity of the membrane	
at different membrane thickness	153
5.32 Plot of transmittance against wavelength	
at different mass of CNBs in the composite membranes	153
5.33 Plot of $(\alpha h\nu)^2$ against $h\nu$ at different mass of CNBs	157
5.34 Methanol molecule uptake per sulphonic group	

at different concentration of methanol and degree of sulphonation	160
5.35 Effects of CNBs on the methanol molecule uptake per sulphonic	161
5.36 Effect of membrane thickness on the porosity of the membrane	
at different concentration of methanol	162
5.37 Effect of CNBs on the porosity of the membrane	
at different concentrations of methanol	163
5.38 Uptake of solution molecule per sulphonic group	164
5.39 Methanol crossover concentration at different degree of sulphonation	165
5.40 Methanol crossover concentration at different mass of CNBs	167
5.41 Plot of $\frac{1}{2} \ln \frac{C_{A0}}{C_{A0}-2C_B}$ against time at different degree of sulphonation	169
5.42 Plot of $\frac{1}{2} \ln \frac{C_{A0}}{C_{A0}-2C_B}$ against time at different mass of CNBs	170
5.43 Methanol permeation at different degree of sulphonation	
and membrane thickness	172
5.44 Theoretically calculated methanol permeation	173
5.45 Effect of degree of sulphonation on the performance of SPSBR based MEAs	177
5.46 Effect of catalyst loading on the performance of SPSBR and	
Nafion 122 based MEAs	179
5.47 Influence of CNBs on the performance of the SPSBR based MEAs	180
5.48 Durability of blended and non-blended membrane in a fuel cell stack.	181
5.49 Experimental and calculated voltage at different current density	184

LIST OF TABLES

Table no	Page
2.1 Overview of Fuel Cells	20
4.1 Production conditions of CNPs	81
4.2 Products distribution of samples at hydrogen flow rate of 118ml/min and acetylene flow rate of 308ml/min	82
4.3 Products distribution of samples at hydrogen flow rate of 118ml/min and acetylene flow rate of 370ml/min	82
5.1 Solubility of PSBR and SPSBR	102
5.2 Effects of sulphonating agents and sulphonation time on the degree of sulphonation	103
5.3 Effect of sulphonation time and weight of polymer rubber on the ion exchange capacity of the sulphonated rubber at constant stirring speed of 1000 rpm	109
5.4 Effect of sulphonation time and weight of polymer rubber on the degree of sulphonation and viscosity of the sulphonated rubber	110
5.5 Effect of acid concentration on DS and IEC	113
5.6 Effect of time and temperature on the water desorption capacity of the membrane	149
5.7 Energy band and calculated CNBs particles diameter from UV data	159

5.8 Overall diffusion coefficient of the membrane	
at different thickness and degree of sulphonation	171
5.9 Characteristic factor of the composite membranes	174
5.10 Effects of mass of CNBs on the performance of SPSBR based MEAs	180
5.11 Electrochemical kinetic parameters for the single	
fuel cell stack at different mass of carbon nanoballs in the membrane	183
5.12 Error analysis for the calculated and experimental results	187
A1 Actual values of sulphur content, DS and IEC on	
effect of stirring speed of PSBR sulphonation	240
A2 Effects of Acid Concentration on the Degree of Sulphonation	
and Ion Exchange Capacity of PSBR	240
A3 Effects of Acid Concentration on DS, IEC and Viscosity on PSBR	241
A4 Effects of Stirring Speed on Degree of Sulphonation and Ion Exchange Capacity	241
A5 Effects of Stirring Speed on Degree of Sulphonation and Ion Exchange Capacity	241
A6 Effects of Temperature on Degree of Sulphonation	241
A7 Effects of Temperature on Ion Exchange Capacity	242
A8 Effects of Time on Degree of Sulphonation and Ion exchange capacity of PSBR	242
A9 Effects of Time on the Degree of Sulphonation and Viscosity of PSBR	243
A10 Water uptake at different degree of sulphonation and constant	
membrane thickness of 350 μ m	243
A11 Water uptake at different membrane thickness and	
constant degree of sulphonation (9.4%)	244
A12 Effect of carbon nanoballs on the water uptake	244

A13 Effects hydration and temperature on proton conductivity at different degree of sulphonation	245
A14 Effects of membrane thickness on the proton conductivity of the membrane at different degree of sulphonation	245
A15 Effects of carbon nanoballs on the proton conductivity of the membrane	246
A16 Methanol molecule uptake per sulphonic group at different concentration of methanol	246
A17 Effects of membrane thickness on the porosity of the membrane at different concentration of methanol	247
A18 Effects of carbon nanoballs on the porosity of the membrane	247
A19 Uptake of solution per sulphonic group	247
A20 Methanol crossover concentration at different degree of sulphonation	248
A21 Effects of carbon nanoballs on methanol crossover concentration	249
A22 Performance of MEA at different weight of catalyst, constant membrane DS (39.38%) and Nafion 112	250
A23 Power density at different weight of catalyst, constant membrane DS (39.38%) and Nafion 112	250
A24 Performance of MEA at different degree of sulphonation	251
A25 Power density at different at different degree of sulphonation	251
A26 Effects of carbon nanoballs on the Performance of the membrane in a single fuel cell stack	252
A27 Effect of carbon nanoballs on the Power density the membrane in a single fuel cell stack	252