

*An island environment: Saltwater intrusion, groundwater management and water privatization in Cebu*

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Abstract: In the midst of this “Decade of Water”, the Philippines is faced with one of its major cities plagued by water problems for the same shortsightedness that President Lyndon Johnson described in 1968. The fact that this city is in a humid climate rather than a parched one makes the neglect that much more compelling. As Matthew Gandy (2003) states in *Concrete and Clay*, “the history of cities can be read as a history of water”. As this research indicates, Cebu City is no exception. Cebu is the second largest city in the Philippine archipelago and is an ideal place to study these issues for several reasons. It is continuing to experience strong population growth. Also, by all accounts the groundwater in this metropolitan area of over two million people is rapidly deteriorating due to saltwater intrusion. The suspected causative agent is over-pumping, but it is hard to quantify because of incomplete records. It is estimated that withdraws from the approximately 82,000 private wells equals the amount pumped by the Metropolitan Cebu Water District’s (MCWD) 108 wells (Walag 2007). On nearby Olango Island - part of provincial Cebu - about 90% of the wells are saline. Cebu City itself appears headed for the same fate without active intervention. In addition to salt water being drawn into the aquifer, water quality is also being degraded by bacteriological and chemical contaminants that are being drawn down into the aquifer due to the lack of sewage treatment (Walag 2007). This study is a practical foundation in understanding the problems in metropolitan Cebu and the unique private response it has generated. Because of these concerns most Cebuanos are now paying attention to the water they drink. “Usually we drink water without paying much attention to it. We know that water is important to our life, but because of its familiarity very rarely do we consciously appreciate it.” (Emoto 2005).