Rethinking the Land: An Exhibition of Ulster Maps

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RETHINKING THE LAND: AN EXHIBITION OF ULSTER MAPS

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Graphic Abstract

The figures can be any size your designers think work best. Most could be in black and white, apart from figure one.

Biographical Picture

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Garrett Carr is a writer and mapmaker. He lives in Belfast and teaches Creative Writing in Queen's University. Recently he walked Ireland's border from end to end, a journey that resulted in The Rule of the Land, a travelogue published by Faber & Faber in 2017. It is illustrated by Carr's own maps and photographs.

Manuscript - with full author details

RETHINKING THE LAND: AN EXHIBITION OF ULSTER MAPS

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Keywords: Ireland, Ulster, Northern Ireland, cartography, mapmaker, exhibition

Why Rethink?

Between 2012 and 2013 the Irish Times ran a series of illustrated columns called 'A Picture of Ireland'. The series was produced in conjunction with a mapping and data-visualisation research centre called Airo, based near Dublin. Week by week readers were presented with an array of maps; showing the locations of ghost estates, watchtowers from the Napoleonic era, holy wells and wind farms. Other maps in the series charted the distribution of wealth and poverty, cattle and sheep. Most maps covered the whole island but one weekend, when religious faith among the population was the topic, the map focused only on Northern Ireland. (see figure 1, Irish Times 2013). Colour coding was used to display the information, which had been drawn from the Northern Ireland census. We were shown a place split between two colours: green representing Catholics and orange representing Protestants. Areas of solid orange included south Antrim and the north coast around Coleraine. Large areas of solid green

included south Armagh and districts around the Sperrin Mountains. To anyone familiar with Northern Ireland it is a recognisable distribution, and rendered in a visual language that is also familiar, so easy recognition is doubly ensured. Some people might almost find the map comforting.

<< fig1_airomap.tif >>

Caption: Figure 1. Airo map, published in the Irish Times in 2013

I am focusing on this map as it exemplifies a couple of problems in the way Northern Ireland has been treated by cartography. The flaws are not unusual; indeed it is their clichéd nature that is the issue. The first problematic aspect of the map is the way the subject matter has been framed. The topic was religion so the designers felt the rest of the island could be cropped – the map covers Northern Ireland exclusively. There is a certain logic to this, it is in Northern Ireland that not just one but two large religious groups dominate, Catholics and Protestants. Representing just Northern Ireland produces a map with a strong contrast and a sense of story. This latter quality, story, is of course what newspapers are interested it. However, I wonder if including the rest of the island would have told a more interesting story. Charting the overwhelming presence of Catholicism in the south of Ireland might have given Northern Ireland a context, perhaps saying something about why Northern Ireland originally came into being.

Instead, the map was another run at defining the people of Northern Ireland by their religion. It is not that the information is incorrect, Airo work with great exactitude

from census data, it is just that the original question may be losing relevance. To draw out more relevant and useful information about today's Northern Ireland we should perhaps ask different questions, begin from wholly different starting points. The shift to secularism, especially in urban areas, has not passed Northern Ireland by. Indeed, Airo themselves, in their own atlas, have looked at all of Ireland – north and south – by the numbers of people who self-describe as having no religion (Gleeson et al. 2015).

That brings me to the second cliché in the Irish Times map, and the most disheartening one: the use of orange and green. Green is a colour associated with Irish nationalism, and it is simplistic to apply it to Catholicism. Again, this map is not the first to do so, it has been going on for a hundred years. The best thing I can say about this conflation of politics with religion is that it is out-dated. Never mind that some of Ireland's most notable Nationalists were Protestant, recent census results indicate a much more nuanced picture in how Catholic Northern Ireland views itself. A BBC poll published in the very same week as this map found that 38% of Catholic voters were content to be citizens of the United Kingdom (online 2013). The orange and green presentation of Northern Ireland society cannot acknowledge such developments, it cannot engage with nuance. It suggests, misleadingly, that Catholics will always vote green.

Orange is used as a political marker in Northern Ireland because of the Orange Order. This is an exclusively Protestant organisation, dedicated to the preservation and advancement of what it considers to be Protestant values. But it only has about 35,000 members in Northern Ireland, out of an overall population approaching two million people. Being Protestant does not equal being orange. Again the map throws together different concepts in a way that is distorting. The designers may have used the orange and green cliché so the map would be easy to understand, but it has given us a map that

is staid and plain misleading. The map missed an opportunity to question stereotypes and instead reinforced them.

It was in reaction to this map, and the many others like it, that I drew together a touring exhibition of maps called Mapping Alternative Ulster. I believed it was time to showcase some other ways of charting our land and people. I have made and continue to make my own cartographic representations of Northern Ireland and Ireland's border region (some of which are discussed in Carr 2011, 2012, 2017, and garrettcarr.net) but I was not the only one producing such work in and around Northern Ireland. Over the years, I have become a keen observer of the other cartographers, men and women creating maps in a variety of materials and covering a wide range of subjects. Some, like me, work as individuals but collaborative teams are also producing fresh maps. I began getting in touch with the cartographers, going to meet them in their studios, offices or kitchens and inviting them to contribute to an exhibition.

I suppose one of the first things every curator does is define the parameters of their show. I decided to include maps of areas a little beyond Northern Ireland's six counties, going into the nine counties of Ulster. I decided to select maps that were in one sense traditional; they were all flat, printed or drawn on paper. This was mainly to give the show coherence. All the maps look – more or less – like maps in the common sense of the word. None of the cartographers in Mapping Alternative Ulster are simply using their map as a metaphor. None are inward looking, the kinds of maps of the self or the consciousness that the artist Grayson Perry creates. You could – more or less – navigate your way around the physical locations covered by most of these maps by using them as your guides, although each would cause you to consider different elements of your surroundings.

I also decided to include only maps that had some sort of stance; I wanted maps with politics, although not Northern Ireland's traditional sectarian politics. All the maps in Mapping Alternative Ulster draw attention to things that need to change, or be saved, or be simply reassessed. This curatorial decision meant excluding illustrative maps, the kind that might be found in tourist information centres, although many of these are finely crafted they are not challenging in the way I was seeking. All the maps in Mapping Alternative Ulster have cases to make, they are arguments. I'm not sure that many of the cartographers in the show will have read Denis Wood's Power of Maps (1992), nonetheless they have come to similar realisations to those of Wood in that text. They have noticed that maps serve interest groups and further realised that, "the interest served can be yours" (Wood 1992 p. 182). That phrase is a chapter title in The Power of Maps. Wood explains that maps are not mainly neutral documents via which a few elements of propaganda sneak past our defensives. Maps are all propaganda, remove the author's vested interest and you are left with a blank sheet. Wood is not the only one, nor the first to point this out. The distinct additional stance he takes is to remind everyone that the blank sheet can be ours too. It is available, open and democratic. What may be judged as conspiracies by other theorists are to Wood merely vested interests, views to advance, and most of us have them. Wood suggests, implores in fact, that we get our own blank sheets and learn the art of cartography, using the craft to make our own arguments. One way or another, all the artists in Mapping Alternative Ulster have sensed this challenge, and risen to it.

As I mentioned, maps were being made by both teams and individuals. Another defining characteristic that can be used to categorise Ulster's independent mapmakers are the broad spheres in which they work. One camp is distinctly urban, usually focusing on Belfast. They use digital technology and are engaged in an international

discourse around mapping and data visualisation. Their work is usually connected to questions about the quality of the environment and the lived experience of the city. They are often connected to one of the city's universities. The other category is rural; these cartographers were sometimes difficult to track down. They work with paper, pen and tracing paper. They tend not to place their maps in a wider context, perhaps only showing their work on the wall of a local library. Their work is usually connected to preservation, be it of place names, language, lore or traditional trades and crafts.

In the end I gathered together the work of a dozen practitioners for the Mapping Alternative Ulster exhibition. It has so far run in Belfast's Ulster Museum (June 2014), Strabane's Alley Arts Centre (May 2015) and the Marketplace Gallery in Armagh (December 2016). The make-up of the show evolves as it goes to different locations and as I find new maps. I hope at some point to send the show to venues outside of Northern Ireland. Below, to give a sense of the exhibition is a short tour looking at some of the maps. I used the broad categorisations of rural/urban and individual/team, to pick out a cross section for this tour. These also happen to be the first alternative Ulster maps that I was introduced to or stumbled upon. These were the maps that first made me want to organise an exhibition where they could be seen by bigger audiences.

The Missing City

2009

Forum for Alternative Belfast

This map was one of the first projects published by a collective of architects and urban planners called Forum for Alternative Belfast (see figure 2). The data for the map was compiled over a week in August 2009 by a team of about fifty postgraduate students and professionals. They fanned out around Belfast's centre and marked up the city's

vacant or underused sites. These areas are highlighted in red on the map, some was in use as car parking, other areas were brownfield. The map reveals a city centre that was emptying, leaving an often-desolate band around the city centre. Belfast had 470,000 people in 1950 but by 2009 the population stood at about 270,000, a population that is projected to shrink further. It is striking that so much of the centre is hollow, Belfast has been broken up with sterile spaces that can seem barren and unpleasant to traverse. This map warns us that are we at risk of falling below the critical mass of people needed to sustain a successful city, while, more positively, showing that there is plenty of space in the city centre to vitalise. There is much potential for the creation of active and inviting places.

<< fig2_themissingcity.tif >>

Caption: Figure 2. Detail from 'The Missing City' map.

'The Missing City' is an example of using a map as lobbying tool, and it had already found a wide audience before Mapping Alternative Ulster. In 2010 it was launched at a packed public event in Belfast City Hall. I was there too. Opening proceedings, the Lord Mayor commented on the usefulness of the Forum's research, suggesting that it helped with important work bring life to the city. "We wish to see [the city] evolve and change," she said, "and turn into the dynamic European city that we wish it to be" (Meban 2010).

After this map, Forum for Alternative Belfast went on to produce a series of other urban "re-stitching plans" for Belfast (PlaceNI 2015), suggesting ways for the city to deal with its longstanding problems of disconnection. The mission was always to bring coherence to Belfast and make it more human-friendly, walkable and liveable.

Owen Hatherley, in his study of urban Britain, A New Kind of Bleak, remarked that the city was lucky to have the Forum (Hatherley 2012 p. 328). Perhaps on principle, the Forum based themselves in an old, under-maintained and underused city centre building, quite unlike the glassy and pristine offices of architectural firms nearby. When I visited the first thing I noticed was that the occupants names were written with felt tip on the buttons of the intercom by the door. In the Forum's studios, diagrams and plans were pinned up on the walls, lengths of modellers' wood leaned into corners or were stacked on mismatched furniture. There was an atmosphere of creation and possibility. That morning a group of a dozen students were painting model buildings, for a three-dimensional version of 'The Missing City' map. The completed model was approximately twenty-feet square, four storey buildings coming to about the height of a matchbox stood on end. It was exhibited too (although not in the Mapping Alternative Ulster exhibition), bringing the Forum's concerns to even more people.

Unfortunately, Forum for Alternative Belfast dissolved in 2015, frustrated with their lack of meaningful impact on the city. Belfast, it seems, was not quite ready for them. However, Forum for Alternative Belfast's maps did feed usefully into debates about urban planning in the city and they continue to do so.

The Micro-Toponomy of Teelin

1998

Dan McGinley

'The Missing City' already had a platform without my intervention. But when I first saw 'The Micro-Toponomy of Teelin' it was unframed and pinned to the wall of the community centre in a small village in County Donegal. This printout was one of a small handful that had been made. I was struck by the amount of detail and the sheer

size of the map, it is about 150 centimetres tall, and was immediately determined that more people should see it.

The mapmaker, Dan McGinley, has charted the local place names of several rural locations in County Donegal, beginning with places he knew from his own childhood. “As a child I found the place names fascinating,” he told me, “they had the quality of incantations.” In the late nineties McGinley turned his attention to Donegal’s most impressive mountain cliff, coordinating a project that mapped Slieve League and Teelin, the townland around it (see figure 3). Making the map was a community effort. McGinley mobilised the local people to collect and preserve place names, and in the correct orthography. The names were already slipping from use, and would vanish completely as the older men and women died, taking their knowledge with them. Meetings were held with locals and the recollections of the older people were especially sought. There was often much debate before it was decided exactly where on the map a name should go. McGinley decided to give primacy to the local dialect: similar names might be spelt differently in other parts of Ireland.

<< fig3_teelin.tif >>
Caption: Figure 3. Detail from ‘The Micro-Toponomy of Teelin’.

McGinley worked as a computer programmer and to help with the logistics of organising all those names he created a software programme that works like a crossword solver, searching an electronic word list for word patterns. This helped with the process of translation from speech into written words.

In a cartouche on the lower left of the map is a list of some of the people whose knowledge went into the project. Sadly, many of them have since died. It would be impossible to create a similar map of Teelin now.

Cat and Mouse

2008

Anne-Marie Dillon

This map existed for only six weeks and is represented in Mapping Alternative Ulster through photographs. It is a collage of found-objects, charting a divided community called Ballykinlar, a village in Co. Down. An artist-activist called Anne-Marie Dillon put the map together on the floor of the Parochial Hall in the village. Its role was to be a talking point during a sequence of community meetings taking place there. Dillon hoped the map would draw out local knowledge and, in its playful way, open minds. Ballykinlar is faced with multiple issues; it lacks a community centre, has poor transport links and there is a large military base situated between the village and the sea. A wide variety of stakeholders sent representatives to the meetings; people from the army, the police, social care, the housing executive, the county council and various political parties. Many fractious issues were discussed; the village even has its own, smaller scale, version of the town name problem experience by Derry/Londonderry. Whether you use Ballykinlar or Ballykinler is sometimes taken as indication of your cultural background and your probable view on Northern Ireland's constitutional status. The groups attending the meetings had some conflicting ambitions and differing levels of influence, hence the map's title: 'Cat and Mouse'.

All the objects used for the map were sourced from friends, family or car boot sales (see figures 4a and 4b). To represent the military installations in the army base Dillon used parts of a toy castle, borrowed from her children. Houses inside the army base were represented by model cottages that came free with tokens from Tetley Tea packets, while houses outside the base were represented with a more traditionally Irish

style of ceramic cottage, the kind you might find in tourist gift shops. Some houses were represented by teapots that happened to be in the shape of houses – a wonderful encapsulation of the domestic I think. She also used butter dishes and biscuit tins. Dillon chose these domestic objects because she felt the meetings would gain from being reminded of homely spaces. “At home you’re more likely to be truthful,” she says.

<< fig4a_ ballykinlarmap.tif >> << fig4b_ ballykinlarmap.tif >>

Caption: Figure 4a and 4b. Details of the map while on display.

Most artists know the importance of a public platform and are open to being contacted, but despite being a dedicated artist Anne-Marie Dillon was difficult to get in touch with. She had no mobile phone and was rarely on the internet. I had to resort to sending letters to her address in Ballykinlar, which felt almost quaint. She had little interest in projects once they were finished, she was always on to the next thing. When I finally managed to open up a stable line of communication I came to admire her disinterest in record keeping and self-promotion. There was a sense in which this map was part of a conversation, therefore incomplete, almost irrelevant, in itself. I disagreed that the map lacks significance though, and luckily her son had photographed it during its short life and I was able to source the images from him.

Friend Map

1976

John Carson

In 1976 John Carson was an art student in Belfast. “I was influenced by art movements such as conceptual art, land art and socially engaged practice,” he wrote in an email to me. “I was interested in artists like Richard Long, Robert Smithson and Stephen Willats who were taking their ideas out of the art institution and into the landscape or into social contexts.” But Carson’s ambitions were frustrated by what he saw as the limited outlook of the art school. “In the fine art department at the time there was an emphasis on esoteric abstraction,” he writes. “Realism, representation, and any reference to the political violence, which we were all living through, were frowned upon. Meanwhile we were seeing bombs go off from our studio windows, and hearing almost daily news of atrocities. I wanted to get out of the ‘ivory tower’ and so I devised a series of projects, which enabled me to do so.”

Carson visited all his friends in Belfast and around the nearby town of Carrickfergus, where he was resident at the time. He took a photograph of each person and printed the images to the size of a passport photo. He then glued each photograph to a standard Ordnance Survey Belfast map and drew lines to connect his friends to his home and each other (see figure 5). There are three types of connection in Carson’s map. Direct link lines go from the artist’s home to the homes of friends. Indirect link lines go to places where they and the artist associate, for example the pilot station in Carrickfergus. And finally, secondary link lines connect friends of the artist who also know each other.

<< fig5_ friendmap.tif >>

Caption: Figure 5. Detail from ‘Friend Map’.

Today, social networking sites like Facebook encourage us to think of our relationships in visual schemas. We know someone who knows someone who knows someone who we, and here a circle is drawn, happen to know too. This social cartography is drawn in the imagination more than on paper but it is easy to imagine that it would result in complicated charts of criss-crossed lines, charts a lot like Carson's. But his Belfast map was created long before social media, there was something prescient about his map of friends.

This map charts a pre-internet social network, but this description does not capture all its qualities. There is a certain warmth in that Carson drew every line by hand and visited every person to take every photograph. Carson's handcrafting invests intimacy into the map, showing a place where lives overlap, where people do not just live, nor just live together, but live with togetherness. The early to mid-seventies were the bloodiest phase of the Troubles. 295 people were killed in 1976, the year of the map's creation (Sutton 1994). Carson's work tells an alternative story to the murals and bombs of the time. The lines crossed religious, political and geographical divides, friendship was happening. "I wanted to indicate that positive relationships existed, in spite of the Troubles," writes Carson.

Folk Maps of Fermanagh

1970 — 2010

Johnny McKeagney

Johnny McKeagney began recording his locality, around the village of Tempo, Co. Fermanagh, in the 1960s. He wrote down stories, lore and scraps of history that he would hear from customers in his grocery shop. For notepaper he used the stack of

small paper bags normally reserved for selling sweets. That was until his wife, Teresa, bought him a notebook shortly after they were married. Neither of them knew it at the time but Johnny was embarking on a recording and mapping project that would occupy him for decades. Johnny McKeagney's wife is now his widow, he died in 2010. When I visited their home in Tempo she told me that McKeagney's work may have been rooted in the early death of both his parents. "He'd never gotten the chance to ask them about the times gone by," Teresa said. "So, as he got older himself he started asking around about things, gathering things from other people, making up for it."

<< fig6a_mckeagneymap.tif >> << fig6b_ mckeagneymap.tif >>

Caption: Details from two of Johnny McKeagney's maps

Through hundreds of A3 posters McKeagney charted his local townlands, villages, lakes and rivers, but also the birdlife, local traditions, history, songs, vernacular architecture and anything else that caught his interest. Upstairs in his house, I was allowed to spend some time in Johnny's studio, a small room with a view over the backyard and to the trees beyond. There were many dozens of folders lined up on shelves, each crammed with articles cut from newspapers and with Johnny's own notes. Several of the black pens he used for his illustrations stood waiting in a beaker.

Although his subject matter was often traditional there is something radical in McKeagney's work. In a globalised era, he focused exclusively on one small area. In the digital age he worked only with pen, ink and a photocopier. The latter is an interesting tool; one he may not have used were there not an architecture practice nearby that allowed him access to theirs. Johnny did not tend to draw the same thing twice, and a repeating motif – a certain bird for example – appears again and again

throughout his body of work. Many of the maps are collages, but a collage where the artist originated each part, photocopying and pasting together his own drawings (there are a few exceptions, sometimes an old leaflet or bus ticket is included in the array). The final act of creating each map was to photocopy the assemblage one last time, finalising and sealing the work on a single page. I must admit that I sometimes preferred the works one step back, when they were still collages. I felt they had a more immediate and personal quality at that stage — the maker's hand more clearly visible. But Johnny's family did not like the idea of exhibiting these 'unfinished' works; or rather they were concerned that Johnny may not have liked it.

I usually show about a dozen of Johnny McKeagney's maps in a run of Mapping Alternative Ulster. It is just a tiny fragment of his work; there are hundreds of others that are just as intriguing. Together, the maps constitute an incredibly deep and steady gaze at a small place. McKeagney read everything that he could find about his area, but also got out of his chair to explore his locality in detail, walking everywhere and speaking to everyone he met. "He was away with the wind," says Teresa.

Concluding Remarks

Running an exhibition has made me realise the value of a comments book. I purchase an unlined notebook for every run of the show, and leave it by the exit along with a request that visitors use it to write down their reactions. I work for Queen's University, Belfast, and as any one working in a university knows, we must prove that our public work is making an impact. In order to measure this, we are asked to provide evidence of change in the audiences' views or mind-set resulting from the project. This is a big ask; to reach into the minds of the general public and identify any recalibration that occurred. The comments book is one opportunity, although a rather blunt one. Visitors don't always

use the wording that I would most like: “Maps are cool!” and “Boo Sat Nav!” don’t really help me create a case for the power of the exhibition. But I have found a striking amount of engagement with the show expressed in the three notebooks and, taken together, I believe the comments indicate that Mapping Alternative Ulster has indeed brought about much thoughtful consideration. ‘T’ commented during the Belfast run of the show: “This exhibition is both fascinating and inspiring – in everyday life we can see maps as quite banal things but the feelings and sentiments that locations can evoke in is very clearly displayed here. Many thanks for helping me look at the map of Ulster in a new way.” Irene remarked; “Never thought of the alternative use of maps. Nice idea.” In the same comments book is a reaction, from a C. O’Toole, that I particularly appreciate; “What a wonderful, imaginative exhibition. Very inspiring and almost childlike in its joy. My six-year-old also loved it and it will no doubt shape what she next draws at our kitchen table.” Perhaps these quotes can be taken as evidence of new perspectives and changed minds, some rethinking. Nobody, in any run of Mapping Alternative Ulster, used the comments book to express a longing to see the familiar green and orange again.

www.mappingalternativeulster.net

The copyright for each map used to illustrate this article remains with the artist.

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Figure 1. Airo map, published in the *Irish Times* in 2013

Figure 2. Detail from ‘The Missing City’ map.

Figure 3. Detail from ‘The Micro-Toponomy of Teelin’.

Figure 4a and 4b. Details of ‘Cat and Mouse’ while on display.

Figure 5. Detail from ‘Friend Map’

Figure 6a and 6b. Details from two of Johnny McKeagney’s maps.

Figure 1

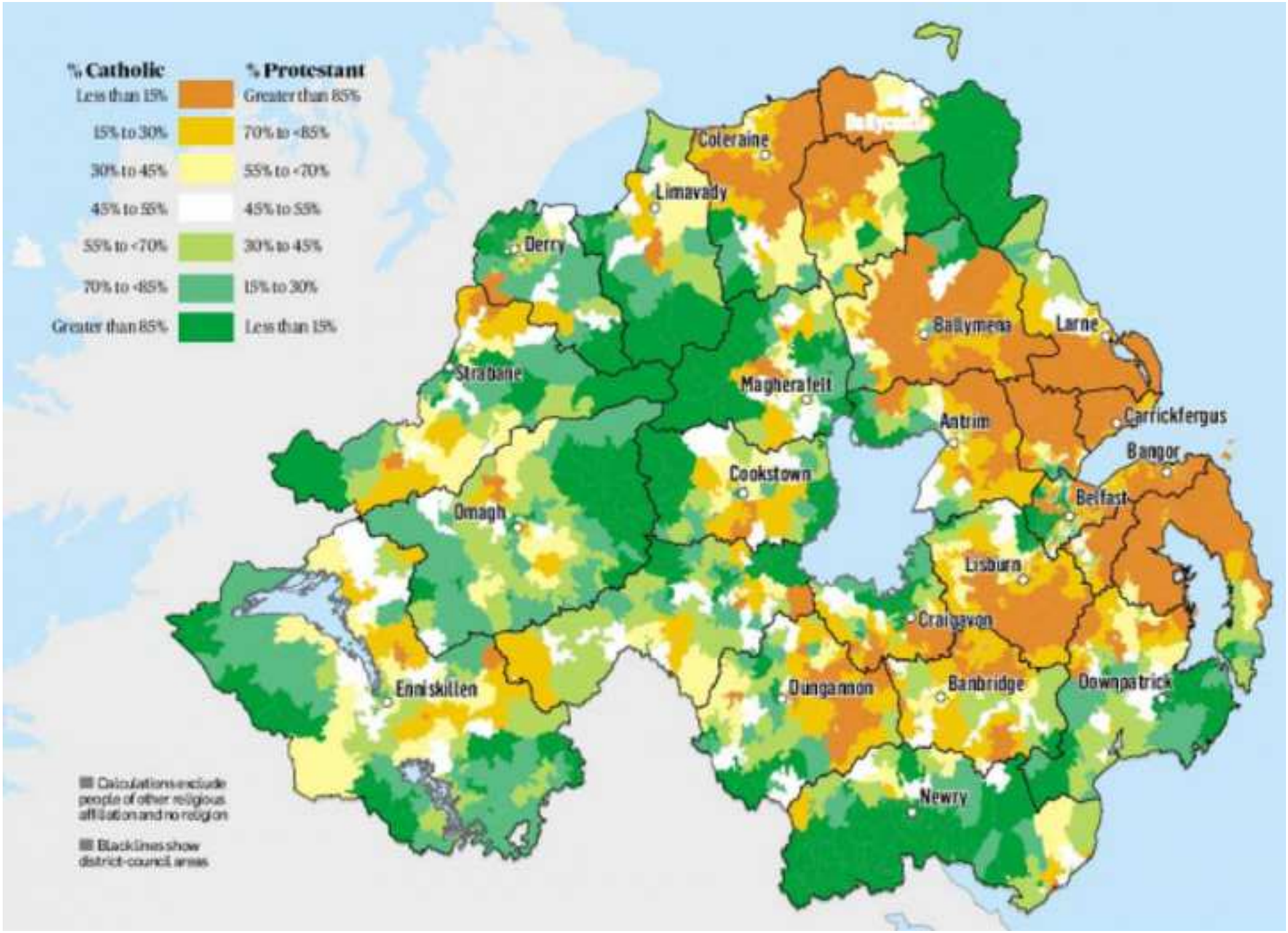

% Catholic
Less than 15%
15% to 30%
30% to 45%
45% to 55%
55% to <70%
70% to <85%
Greater than 85%
% Protestant
Greater than 85%
70% to <85%
55% to <70%
45% to 55%
30% to 45%
15% to 30%
Less than 15%
Calculations exclude people of other religious affiliation and no religion
Blacklines show district council areas
Coleraine
Limavady
Derry
Strabane
Omagh
Enniskillen
Cookstown
Magherafelt
Ballymena
Larne
Antrim
Carrickfergus
Bangor
Belfast
Lisburn
Craigavon
Dungannon
Banbridge
Downpatrick
Newry

Figure 2

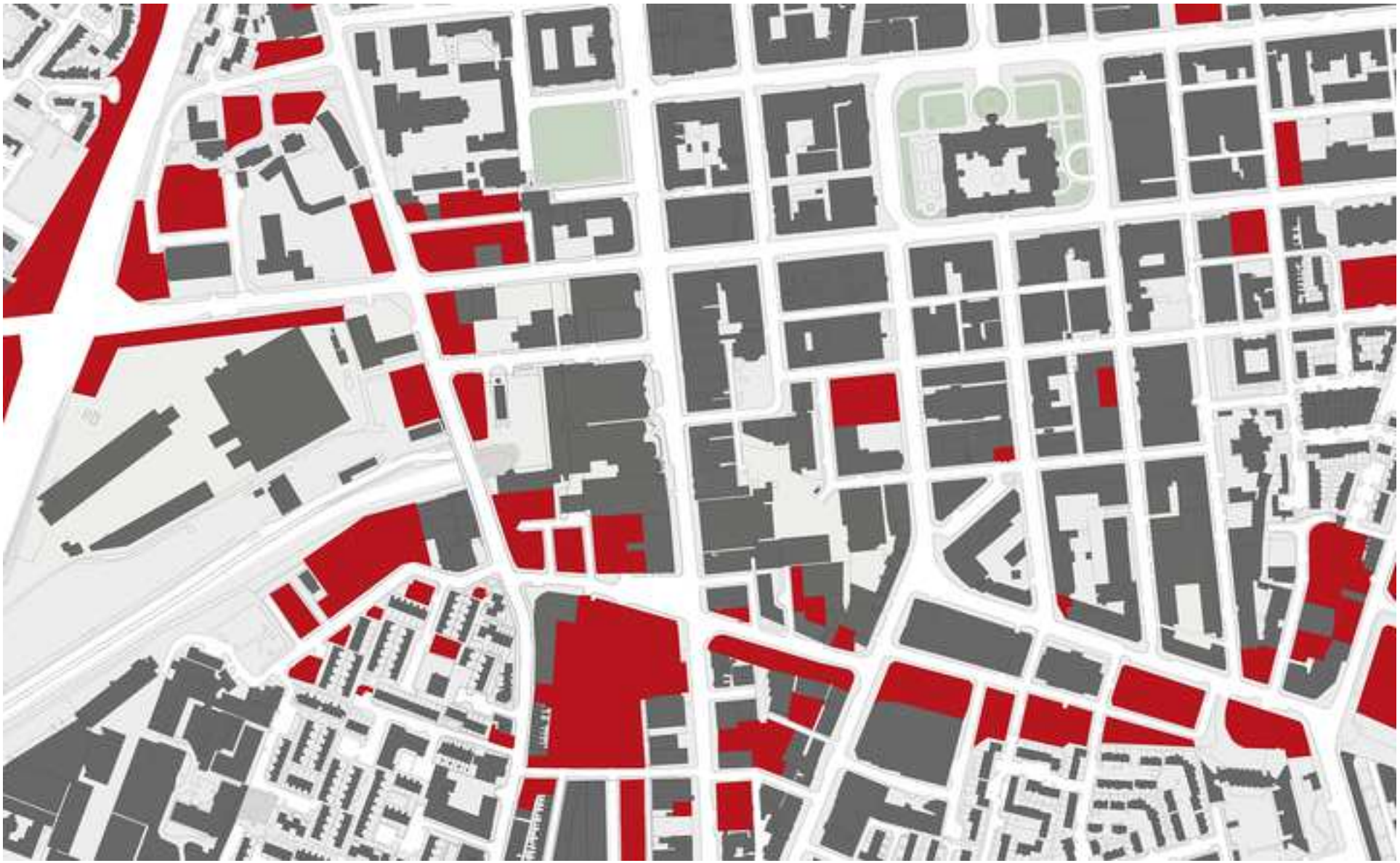


Figure 3

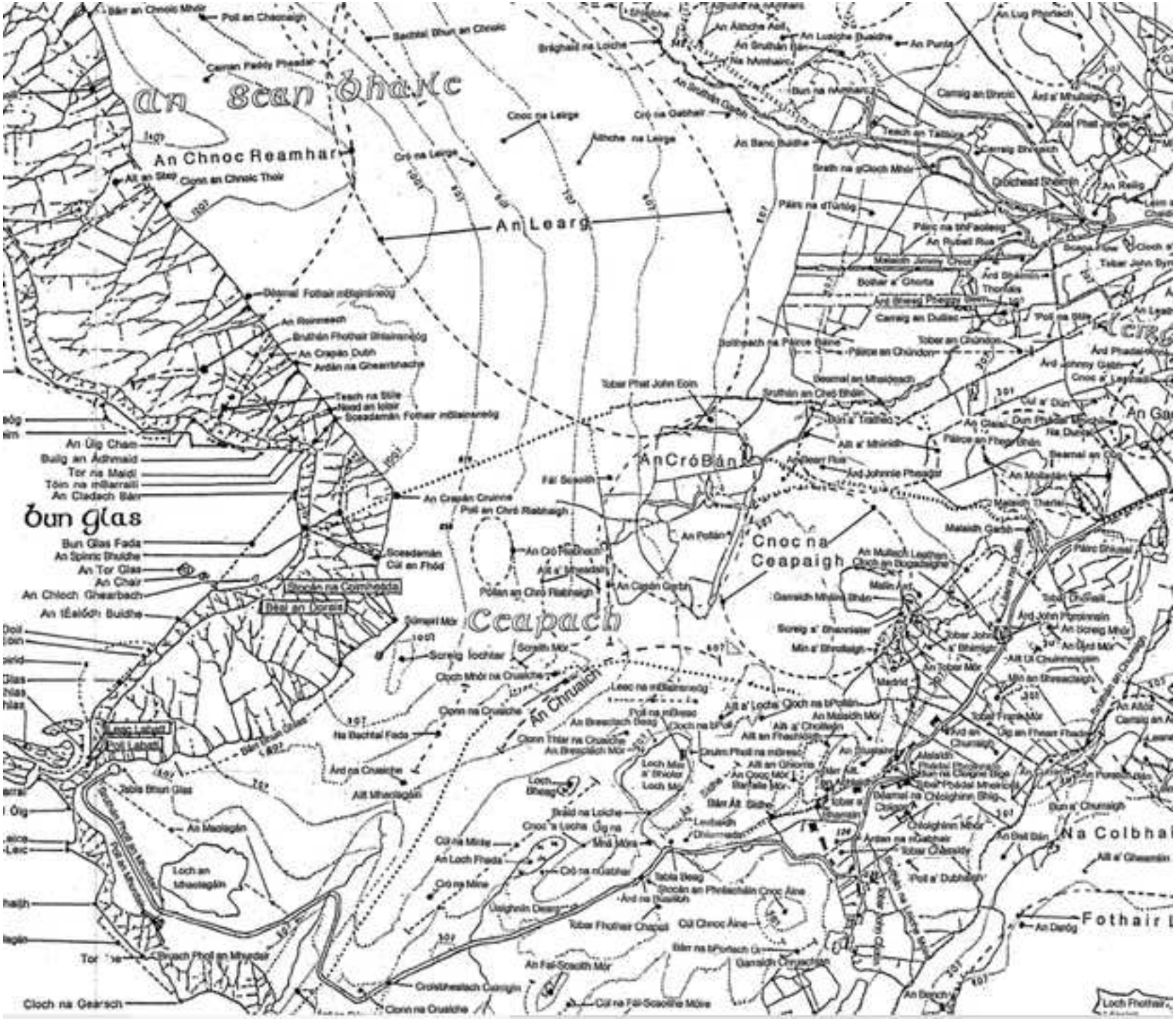

An Sean Bhaile
An Chnoc Reamhar
An Leargh
An Cró Bán
Cnoc na Ceapaigh
Ceapach
Bun Glas
An Chruaich
Na Colbhai
Fothair
Cloch na Gearsch

Figure 4a

Figure 4b

Figure 5

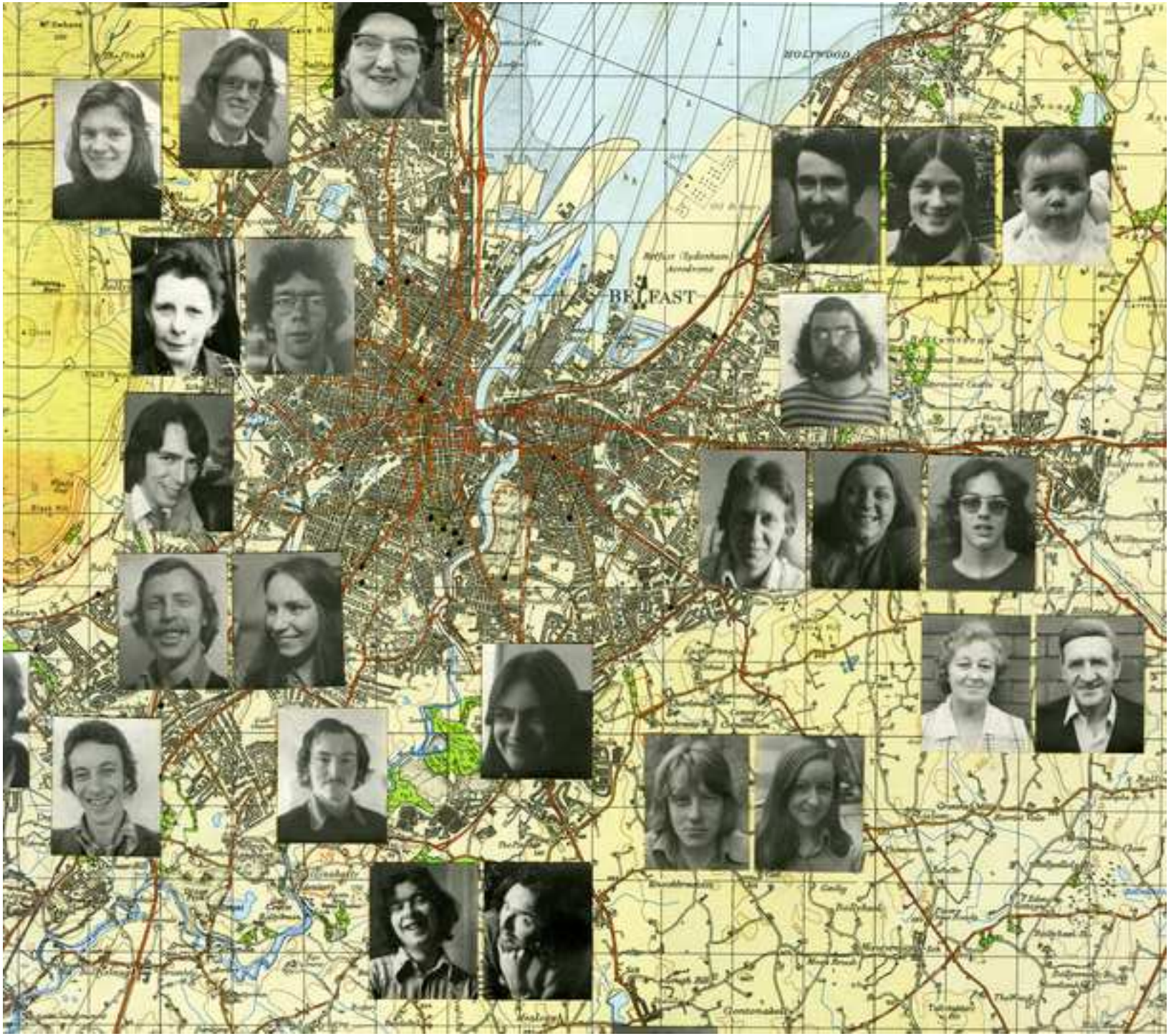
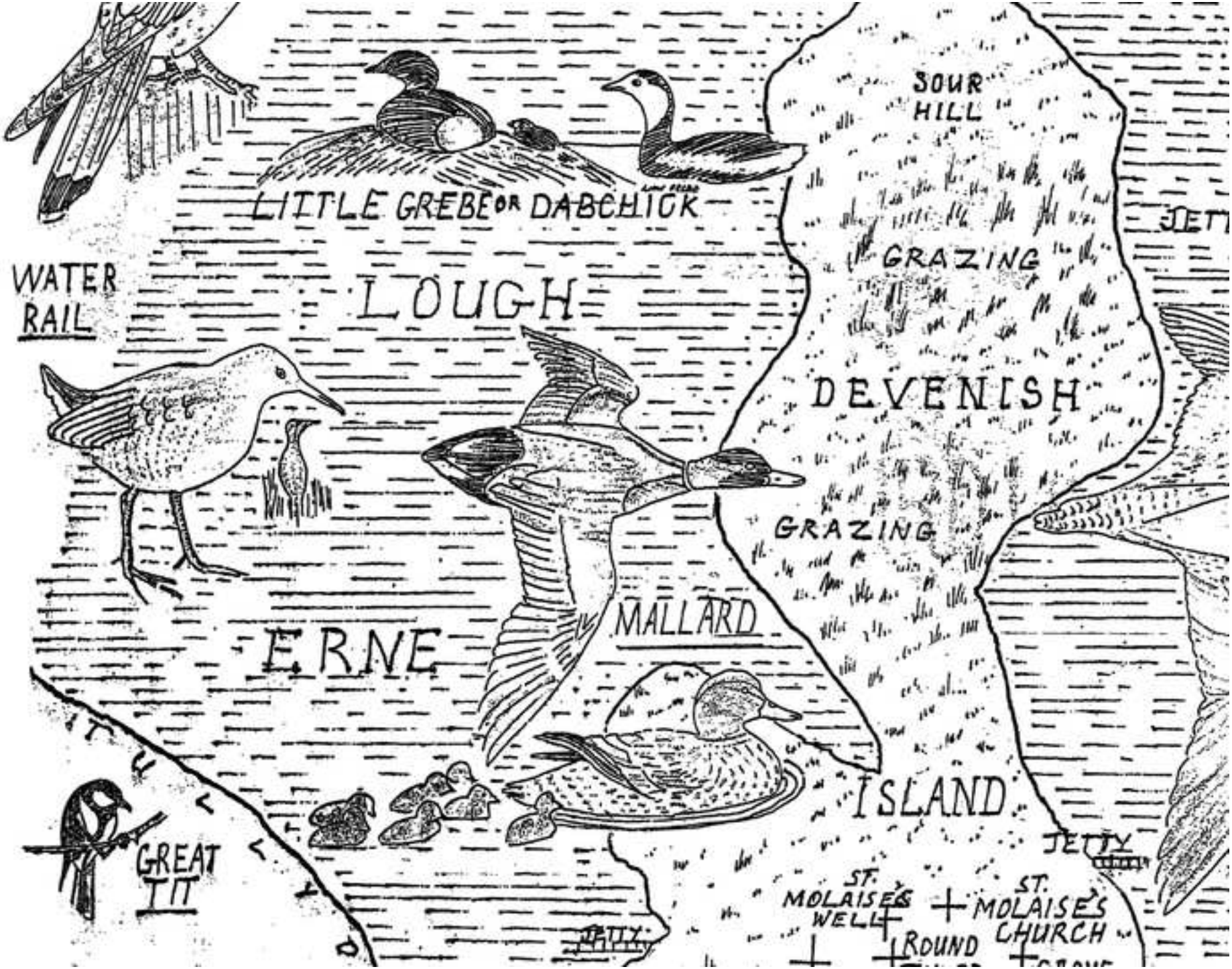


Figure 6a


SOUR
HILL
LITTLE GREBE OR DABCHICK
JETT
GRAZING
WATER
RAIL
LOUGH
DEVENISH
GRAZING
MALLARD
ERNE
ISLAND
GREAT
TIT
JETTY
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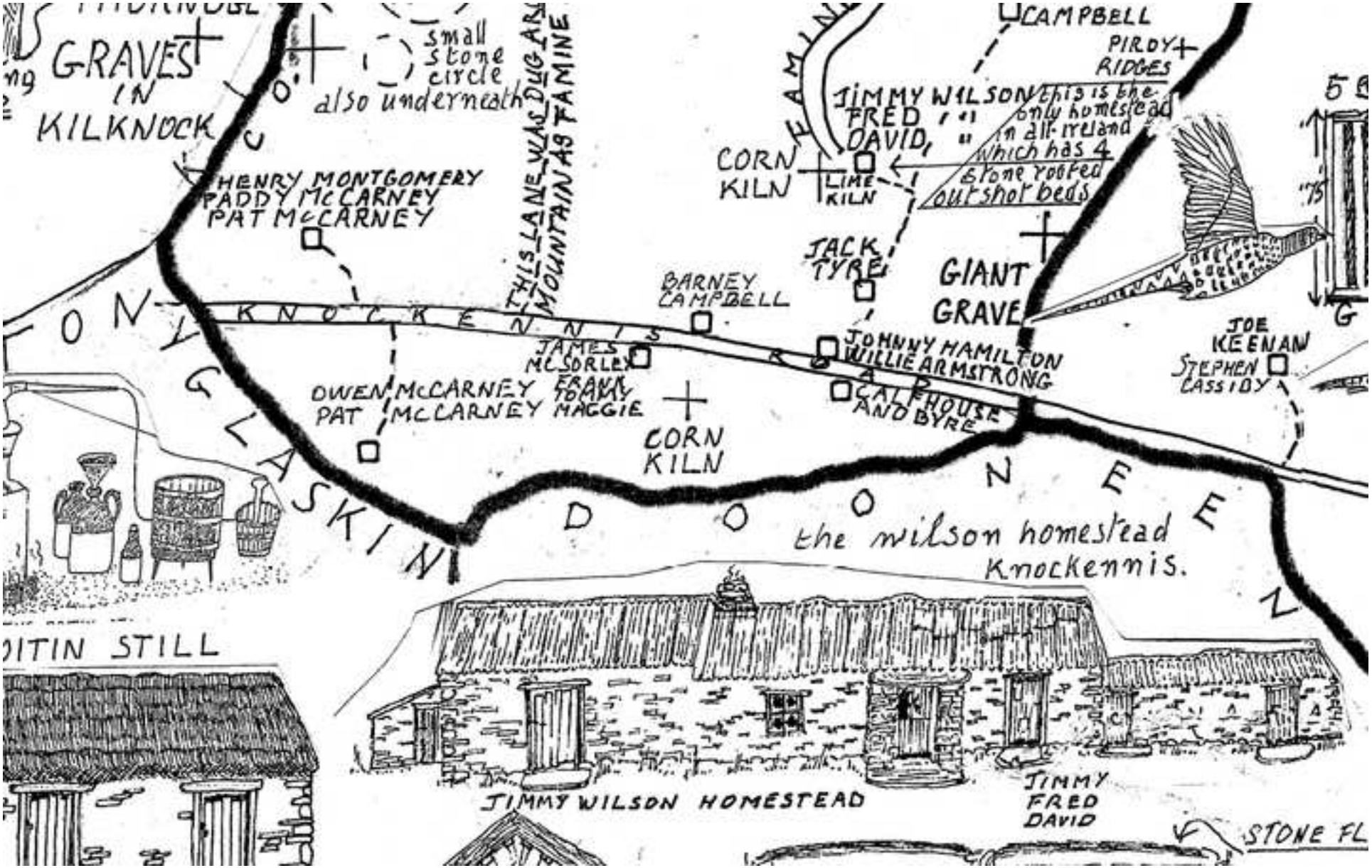
MOLAISE'S
WELL
ST.
MOLAISE'S
CHURCH
ROUND

Figure 6b


GRAVES IN KILKNOCK
small stone circle also underneath
HENRY MONTGOMERY
PADDY McCARNEY
PAT McCARNEY
THIS LANE WAS DUG AS MOUNTAIN AS FAMINE
CAMPBELL
PIRDY RIDGES
JIMMY WILSON
FRED
DAVID
this is the only homestead in all ireland which has 4 stone roofed outshot beds
CORN KILN
LIME KILN
JACK TYRE
GIANT GRAVE
BARNEY CAMPBELL
KNOCKENNIS
JAMES McSORLEY
JOHNNY HAMILTON
WILLIE ARMSTRONG
CALFHOUSE AND BYRE
JOE KEENAN
STEPHEN CASSIDY
OWEN McCARNEY
PAT McCARNEY
FRANK
TOMMY
MAGGIE
CORN KILN
TONYGLASKIN
DOONEEN
the wilson homestead
Knockennis.
POITIN STILL
JIMMY WILSON HOMESTEAD
JIMMY
FRED
DAVID
STONE FL

RETHINKING THE LAND: AN EXHIBITION OF ULSTER MAPS

The author curates a touring exhibition of Northern Ireland cartography, called Mapping Alternative Ulster. The project emerged from a dissatisfaction with how Northern Ireland is represented in maps, one example is given. To counter them, he sought independent cartographers making original maps. The curator discusses the criteria he applied when selecting work for the show. He wanted maps with politics, although not the region's traditional sectarian politics. All the selected maps constitute arguments, critiquing problems in the lived environment or drawing attention to valuable things that may be at risk. The latter sections of the article discuss five of the contributors and looks at their work in detail. In conclusion, the impact of the exhibition is assessed by looking at visitor comments. Illustrated.

Keywords: Ireland, Ulster, Northern Ireland, cartography, mapmaker, exhibition

Why Rethink?

Between 2012 and 2013 the Irish Times ran a series of illustrated columns called 'A Picture of Ireland'. The series was produced in conjunction with a mapping and data-visualisation research centre called Airo, based near Dublin. Week by week readers were presented with an array of maps; showing the locations of ghost estates, watchtowers from the Napoleonic era, holy wells and wind farms. Other maps in the series charted the distribution of wealth and poverty, cattle and sheep. Most maps covered the whole island but one weekend, when religious faith among the population was the topic, the map focused only on Northern Ireland. (see figure 1, Irish Times 2013). Colour coding was used to display the information, which had been drawn from the Northern Ireland census. We were shown a place split between two colours: green representing Catholics and orange representing Protestants. Areas of solid orange included south Antrim and the north coast around Coleraine. Large areas of solid green

included south Armagh and districts around the Sperrin Mountains. To anyone familiar with Northern Ireland it is a recognisable distribution, and rendered in a visual language that is also familiar, so easy recognition is doubly ensured. Some people might almost find the map comforting.

<< fig1_airomap.tif >>

Caption: Figure 1. Airo map, published in the Irish Times in 2013

I am focusing on this map as it exemplifies a couple of problems in the way Northern Ireland has been treated by cartography. The flaws are not unusual; indeed it is their clichéd nature that is the issue. The first problematic aspect of the map is the way the subject matter has been framed. The topic was religion so the designers felt the rest of the island could be cropped – the map covers Northern Ireland exclusively. There is a certain logic to this, it is in Northern Ireland that not just one but two large religious groups dominate, Catholics and Protestants. Representing just Northern Ireland produces a map with a strong contrast and a sense of story. This latter quality, story, is of course what newspapers are interested it. However, I wonder if including the rest of the island would have told a more interesting story. Charting the overwhelming presence of Catholicism in the south of Ireland might have given Northern Ireland a context, perhaps saying something about why Northern Ireland originally came into being.

Instead, the map was another run at defining the people of Northern Ireland by their religion. It is not that the information is incorrect, Airo work with great exactitude

from census data, it is just that the original question may be losing relevance. To draw out more relevant and useful information about today's Northern Ireland we should perhaps ask different questions, begin from wholly different starting points. The shift to secularism, especially in urban areas, has not passed Northern Ireland by. Indeed, Airo themselves, in their own atlas, have looked at all of Ireland – north and south – by the numbers of people who self-describe as having no religion (Gleeson et al. 2015).

That brings me to the second cliché in the Irish Times map, and the most disheartening one: the use of orange and green. Green is a colour associated with Irish nationalism, and it is simplistic to apply it to Catholicism. Again, this map is not the first to do so, it has been going on for a hundred years. The best thing I can say about this conflation of politics with religion is that it is out-dated. Never mind that some of Ireland's most notable Nationalists were Protestant, recent census results indicate a much more nuanced picture in how Catholic Northern Ireland views itself. A BBC poll published in the very same week as this map found that 38% of Catholic voters were content to be citizens of the United Kingdom (online 2013). The orange and green presentation of Northern Ireland society cannot acknowledge such developments, it cannot engage with nuance. It suggests, misleadingly, that Catholics will always vote green.

Orange is used as a political marker in Northern Ireland because of the Orange Order. This is an exclusively Protestant organisation, dedicated to the preservation and advancement of what it considers to be Protestant values. But it only has about 35,000 members in Northern Ireland, out of an overall population approaching two million people. Being Protestant does not equal being orange. Again the map throws together different concepts in a way that is distorting. The designers may have used the orange and green cliché so the map would be easy to understand, but it has given us a map that

is staid and plain misleading. The map missed an opportunity to question stereotypes and instead reinforced them.

It was in reaction to this map, and the many others like it, that I drew together a touring exhibition of maps called Mapping Alternative Ulster. I believed it was time to showcase some other ways of charting our land and people. I have made and continue to make my own cartographic representations of Northern Ireland and Ireland's border region (some of which are discussed in Carr 2011, 2012, 2017, and garrettcarr.net) but I was not the only one producing such work in and around Northern Ireland. Over the years, I have become a keen observer of the other cartographers, men and women creating maps in a variety of materials and covering a wide range of subjects. Some, like me, work as individuals but collaborative teams are also producing fresh maps. I began getting in touch with the cartographers, going to meet them in their studios, offices or kitchens and inviting them to contribute to an exhibition.

I suppose one of the first things every curator does is define the parameters of their show. I decided to include maps of areas a little beyond Northern Ireland's six counties, going into the nine counties of Ulster. I decided to select maps that were in one sense traditional; they were all flat, printed or drawn on paper. This was mainly to give the show coherence. All the maps look – more or less – like maps in the common sense of the word. None of the cartographers in Mapping Alternative Ulster are simply using their map as a metaphor. None are inward looking, the kinds of maps of the self or the consciousness that the artist Grayson Perry creates. You could – more or less – navigate your way around the physical locations covered by most of these maps by using them as your guides, although each would cause you to consider different elements of your surroundings.

I also decided to include only maps that had some sort of stance; I wanted maps with politics, although not Northern Ireland's traditional sectarian politics. All the maps in Mapping Alternative Ulster draw attention to things that need to change, or be saved, or be simply reassessed. This curatorial decision meant excluding illustrative maps, the kind that might be found in tourist information centres, although many of these are finely crafted they are not challenging in the way I was seeking. All the maps in Mapping Alternative Ulster have cases to make, they are arguments. I'm not sure that many of the cartographers in the show will have read Denis Wood's Power of Maps (1992), nonetheless they have come to similar realisations to those of Wood in that text. They have noticed that maps serve interest groups and further realised that, "the interest served can be yours" (Wood 1992 p. 182). That phrase is a chapter title in The Power of Maps. Wood explains that maps are not mainly neutral documents via which a few elements of propaganda sneak past our defensives. Maps are all propaganda, remove the author's vested interest and you are left with a blank sheet. Wood is not the only one, nor the first to point this out. The distinct additional stance he takes is to remind everyone that the blank sheet can be ours too. It is available, open and democratic. What may be judged as conspiracies by other theorists are to Wood merely vested interests, views to advance, and most of us have them. Wood suggests, implores in fact, that we get our own blank sheets and learn the art of cartography, using the craft to make our own arguments. One way or another, all the artists in Mapping Alternative Ulster have sensed this challenge, and risen to it.

As I mentioned, maps were being made by both teams and individuals. Another defining characteristic that can be used to categorise Ulster's independent mapmakers are the broad spheres in which they work. One camp is distinctly urban, usually focusing on Belfast. They use digital technology and are engaged in an international

discourse around mapping and data visualisation. Their work is usually connected to questions about the quality of the environment and the lived experience of the city. They are often connected to one of the city's universities. The other category is rural; these cartographers were sometimes difficult to track down. They work with paper, pen and tracing paper. They tend not to place their maps in a wider context, perhaps only showing their work on the wall of a local library. Their work is usually connected to preservation, be it of place names, language, lore or traditional trades and crafts.

In the end I gathered together the work of a dozen practitioners for the Mapping Alternative Ulster exhibition. It has so far run in Belfast's Ulster Museum (June 2014), Strabane's Alley Arts Centre (May 2015) and the Marketplace Gallery in Armagh (December 2016). The make-up of the show evolves as it goes to different locations and as I find new maps. I hope at some point to send the show to venues outside of Northern Ireland. Below, to give a sense of the exhibition is a short tour looking at some of the maps. I used the broad categorisations of rural/urban and individual/team, to pick out a cross section for this tour. These also happen to be the first alternative Ulster maps that I was introduced to or stumbled upon. These were the maps that first made me want to organise an exhibition where they could be seen by bigger audiences.

The Missing City

2009

Forum for Alternative Belfast

This map was one of the first projects published by a collective of architects and urban planners called Forum for Alternative Belfast (see figure 2). The data for the map was compiled over a week in August 2009 by a team of about fifty postgraduate students and professionals. They fanned out around Belfast's centre and marked up the city's

vacant or underused sites. These areas are highlighted in red on the map, some was in use as car parking, other areas were brownfield. The map reveals a city centre that was emptying, leaving an often-desolate band around the city centre. Belfast had 470,000 people in 1950 but by 2009 the population stood at about 270,000, a population that is projected to shrink further. It is striking that so much of the centre is hollow, Belfast has been broken up with sterile spaces that can seem barren and unpleasant to traverse. This map warns us that are we at risk of falling below the critical mass of people needed to sustain a successful city, while, more positively, showing that there is plenty of space in the city centre to vitalise. There is much potential for the creation of active and inviting places.

<< fig2_themissingcity.tif >>

Caption: Figure 2. Detail from 'The Missing City' map.

'The Missing City' is an example of using a map as lobbying tool, and it had already found a wide audience before Mapping Alternative Ulster. In 2010 it was launched at a packed public event in Belfast City Hall. I was there too. Opening proceedings, the Lord Mayor commented on the usefulness of the Forum's research, suggesting that it helped with important work bring life to the city. "We wish to see [the city] evolve and change," she said, "and turn into the dynamic European city that we wish it to be" (Meban 2010).

After this map, Forum for Alternative Belfast went on to produce a series of other urban "re-stitching plans" for Belfast (PlaceNI 2015), suggesting ways for the city to deal with its longstanding problems of disconnection. The mission was always to bring coherence to Belfast and make it more human-friendly, walkable and liveable.

Owen Hatherley, in his study of urban Britain, A New Kind of Bleak, remarked that the city was lucky to have the Forum (Hatherley 2012 p. 328). Perhaps on principle, the Forum based themselves in an old, under-maintained and underused city centre building, quite unlike the glassy and pristine offices of architectural firms nearby. When I visited the first thing I noticed was that the occupants names were written with felt tip on the buttons of the intercom by the door. In the Forum's studios, diagrams and plans were pinned up on the walls, lengths of modellers' wood leaned into corners or were stacked on mismatched furniture. There was an atmosphere of creation and possibility. That morning a group of a dozen students were painting model buildings, for a three-dimensional version of 'The Missing City' map. The completed model was approximately twenty-feet square, four storey buildings coming to about the height of a matchbox stood on end. It was exhibited too (although not in the Mapping Alternative Ulster exhibition), bringing the Forum's concerns to even more people.

Unfortunately, Forum for Alternative Belfast dissolved in 2015, frustrated with their lack of meaningful impact on the city. Belfast, it seems, was not quite ready for them. However, Forum for Alternative Belfast's maps did feed usefully into debates about urban planning in the city and they continue to do so.

The Micro-Toponomy of Teelin

1998

Dan McGinley

'The Missing City' already had a platform without my intervention. But when I first saw 'The Micro-Toponomy of Teelin' it was unframed and pinned to the wall of the community centre in a small village in County Donegal. This printout was one of a small handful that had been made. I was struck by the amount of detail and the sheer

size of the map, it is about 150 centimetres tall, and was immediately determined that more people should see it.

The mapmaker, Dan McGinley, has charted the local place names of several rural locations in County Donegal, beginning with places he knew from his own childhood. “As a child I found the place names fascinating,” he told me, “they had the quality of incantations.” In the late nineties McGinley turned his attention to Donegal’s most impressive mountain cliff, coordinating a project that mapped Slieve League and Teelin, the townland around it (see figure 3). Making the map was a community effort. McGinley mobilised the local people to collect and preserve place names, and in the correct orthography. The names were already slipping from use, and would vanish completely as the older men and women died, taking their knowledge with them. Meetings were held with locals and the recollections of the older people were especially sought. There was often much debate before it was decided exactly where on the map a name should go. McGinley decided to give primacy to the local dialect: similar names might be spelt differently in other parts of Ireland.

<< fig3_teelin.tif >>
Caption: Figure 3. Detail from ‘The Micro-Toponomy of Teelin’.

McGinley worked as a computer programmer and to help with the logistics of organising all those names he created a software programme that works like a crossword solver, searching an electronic word list for word patterns. This helped with the process of translation from speech into written words.

In a cartouche on the lower left of the map is a list of some of the people whose knowledge went into the project. Sadly, many of them have since died. It would be impossible to create a similar map of Teelin now.

Cat and Mouse

2008

Anne-Marie Dillon

This map existed for only six weeks and is represented in Mapping Alternative Ulster through photographs. It is a collage of found-objects, charting a divided community called Ballykinlar, a village in Co. Down. An artist-activist called Anne-Marie Dillon put the map together on the floor of the Parochial Hall in the village. Its role was to be a talking point during a sequence of community meetings taking place there. Dillon hoped the map would draw out local knowledge and, in its playful way, open minds. Ballykinlar is faced with multiple issues; it lacks a community centre, has poor transport links and there is a large military base situated between the village and the sea. A wide variety of stakeholders sent representatives to the meetings; people from the army, the police, social care, the housing executive, the county council and various political parties. Many fractious issues were discussed; the village even has its own, smaller scale, version of the town name problem experience by Derry/Londonderry. Whether you use Ballykinlar or Ballykinler is sometimes taken as indication of your cultural background and your probable view on Northern Ireland's constitutional status. The groups attending the meetings had some conflicting ambitions and differing levels of influence, hence the map's title: 'Cat and Mouse'.

All the objects used for the map were sourced from friends, family or car boot sales (see figures 4a and 4b). To represent the military installations in the army base Dillon used parts of a toy castle, borrowed from her children. Houses inside the army base were represented by model cottages that came free with tokens from Tetley Tea packets, while houses outside the base were represented with a more traditionally Irish

style of ceramic cottage, the kind you might find in tourist gift shops. Some houses were represented by teapots that happened to be in the shape of houses – a wonderful encapsulation of the domestic I think. She also used butter dishes and biscuit tins. Dillon chose these domestic objects because she felt the meetings would gain from being reminded of homely spaces. “At home you’re more likely to be truthful,” she says.

<< fig4a_ ballykinlarmap.tif >> << fig4b_ ballykinlarmap.tif >>

Caption: Figure 4a and 4b. Details of the map while on display.

Most artists know the importance of a public platform and are open to being contacted, but despite being a dedicated artist Anne-Marie Dillon was difficult to get in touch with. She had no mobile phone and was rarely on the internet. I had to resort to sending letters to her address in Ballykinlar, which felt almost quaint. She had little interest in projects once they were finished, she was always on to the next thing. When I finally managed to open up a stable line of communication I came to admire her disinterest in record keeping and self-promotion. There was a sense in which this map was part of a conversation, therefore incomplete, almost irrelevant, in itself. I disagreed that the map lacks significance though, and luckily her son had photographed it during its short life and I was able to source the images from him.

Friend Map

1976

John Carson

In 1976 John Carson was an art student in Belfast. “I was influenced by art movements such as conceptual art, land art and socially engaged practice,” he wrote in an email to me. “I was interested in artists like Richard Long, Robert Smithson and Stephen Willats who were taking their ideas out of the art institution and into the landscape or into social contexts.” But Carson’s ambitions were frustrated by what he saw as the limited outlook of the art school. “In the fine art department at the time there was an emphasis on esoteric abstraction,” he writes. “Realism, representation, and any reference to the political violence, which we were all living through, were frowned upon. Meanwhile we were seeing bombs go off from our studio windows, and hearing almost daily news of atrocities. I wanted to get out of the ‘ivory tower’ and so I devised a series of projects, which enabled me to do so.”

Carson visited all his friends in Belfast and around the nearby town of Carrickfergus, where he was resident at the time. He took a photograph of each person and printed the images to the size of a passport photo. He then glued each photograph to a standard Ordnance Survey Belfast map and drew lines to connect his friends to his home and each other (see figure 5). There are three types of connection in Carson’s map. Direct link lines go from the artist’s home to the homes of friends. Indirect link lines go to places where they and the artist associate, for example the pilot station in Carrickfergus. And finally, secondary link lines connect friends of the artist who also know each other.

<< fig5_ friendmap.tif >>

Caption: Figure 5. Detail from ‘Friend Map’.

Today, social networking sites like Facebook encourage us to think of our relationships in visual schemas. We know someone who knows someone who knows someone who we, and here a circle is drawn, happen to know too. This social cartography is drawn in the imagination more than on paper but it is easy to imagine that it would result in complicated charts of criss-crossed lines, charts a lot like Carson's. But his Belfast map was created long before social media, there was something prescient about his map of friends.

This map charts a pre-internet social network, but this description does not capture all its qualities. There is a certain warmth in that Carson drew every line by hand and visited every person to take every photograph. Carson's handcrafting invests intimacy into the map, showing a place where lives overlap, where people do not just live, nor just live together, but live with togetherness. The early to mid-seventies were the bloodiest phase of the Troubles. 295 people were killed in 1976, the year of the map's creation (Sutton 1994). Carson's work tells an alternative story to the murals and bombs of the time. The lines crossed religious, political and geographical divides, friendship was happening. "I wanted to indicate that positive relationships existed, in spite of the Troubles," writes Carson.

Folk Maps of Fermanagh

1970 — 2010

Johnny McKeagney

Johnny McKeagney began recording his locality, around the village of Tempo, Co. Fermanagh, in the 1960s. He wrote down stories, lore and scraps of history that he would hear from customers in his grocery shop. For notepaper he used the stack of

small paper bags normally reserved for selling sweets. That was until his wife, Teresa, bought him a notebook shortly after they were married. Neither of them knew it at the time but Johnny was embarking on a recording and mapping project that would occupy him for decades. Johnny McKeagney's wife is now his widow, he died in 2010. When I visited their home in Tempo she told me that McKeagney's work may have been rooted in the early death of both his parents. "He'd never gotten the chance to ask them about the times gone by," Teresa said. "So, as he got older himself he started asking around about things, gathering things from other people, making up for it."

<< fig6a_mckeagneymap.tif >> << fig6b_ mckeagneymap.tif >>

Caption: Details from two of Johnny McKeagney's maps

Through hundreds of A3 posters McKeagney charted his local townlands, villages, lakes and rivers, but also the birdlife, local traditions, history, songs, vernacular architecture and anything else that caught his interest. Upstairs in his house, I was allowed to spend some time in Johnny's studio, a small room with a view over the backyard and to the trees beyond. There were many dozens of folders lined up on shelves, each crammed with articles cut from newspapers and with Johnny's own notes. Several of the black pens he used for his illustrations stood waiting in a beaker.

Although his subject matter was often traditional there is something radical in McKeagney's work. In a globalised era, he focused exclusively on one small area. In the digital age he worked only with pen, ink and a photocopier. The latter is an interesting tool; one he may not have used were there not an architecture practice nearby that allowed him access to theirs. Johnny did not tend to draw the same thing twice, and a repeating motif – a certain bird for example – appears again and again

throughout his body of work. Many of the maps are collages, but a collage where the artist originated each part, photocopying and pasting together his own drawings (there are a few exceptions, sometimes an old leaflet or bus ticket is included in the array). The final act of creating each map was to photocopy the assemblage one last time, finalising and sealing the work on a single page. I must admit that I sometimes preferred the works one step back, when they were still collages. I felt they had a more immediate and personal quality at that stage — the maker's hand more clearly visible. But Johnny's family did not like the idea of exhibiting these 'unfinished' works; or rather they were concerned that Johnny may not have liked it.

I usually show about a dozen of Johnny McKeagney's maps in a run of Mapping Alternative Ulster. It is just a tiny fragment of his work; there are hundreds of others that are just as intriguing. Together, the maps constitute an incredibly deep and steady gaze at a small place. McKeagney read everything that he could find about his area, but also got out of his chair to explore his locality in detail, walking everywhere and speaking to everyone he met. "He was away with the wind," says Teresa.

Concluding Remarks

Running an exhibition has made me realise the value of a comments book. I purchase an unlined notebook for every run of the show, and leave it by the exit along with a request that visitors use it to write down their reactions. I work for Queen's University, Belfast, and as any one working in a university knows, we must prove that our public work is making an impact. In order to measure this, we are asked to provide evidence of change in the audiences' views or mind-set resulting from the project. This is a big ask; to reach into the minds of the general public and identify any recalibration that occurred. The comments book is one opportunity, although a rather blunt one. Visitors don't always

use the wording that I would most like: “Maps are cool!” and “Boo Sat Nav!” don’t really help me create a case for the power of the exhibition. But I have found a striking amount of engagement with the show expressed in the three notebooks and, taken together, I believe the comments indicate that Mapping Alternative Ulster has indeed brought about much thoughtful consideration. ‘T’ commented during the Belfast run of the show: “This exhibition is both fascinating and inspiring – in everyday life we can see maps as quite banal things but the feelings and sentiments that locations can evoke in is very clearly displayed here. Many thanks for helping me look at the map of Ulster in a new way.” Irene remarked; “Never thought of the alternative use of maps. Nice idea.” In the same comments book is a reaction, from a C. O’Toole, that I particularly appreciate; “What a wonderful, imaginative exhibition. Very inspiring and almost childlike in its joy. My six-year-old also loved it and it will no doubt shape what she next draws at our kitchen table.” Perhaps these quotes can be taken as evidence of new perspectives and changed minds, some rethinking. Nobody, in any run of Mapping Alternative Ulster, used the comments book to express a longing to see the familiar green and orange again.

www.mappingalternativeulster.net

The copyright for each map used to illustrate this article remains with the artist.

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Figure 1. Airo map, published in the *Irish Times* in 2013

Figure 2. Detail from ‘The Missing City’ map.

Figure 3. Detail from ‘The Micro-Toponomy of Teelin’.

Figure 4a and 4b. Details of ‘Cat and Mouse’ while on display.

Figure 5. Detail from ‘Friend Map’

Figure 6a and 6b. Details from two of Johnny McKeagney’s maps.