The depopulated Palestinian villages are probably the most powerful element of any commemoration of the 1948 Nakba due to their symbolic relevance to the original inhabitants who were forcibly exiled from their homes to become – along with their millions of descendants – refugees scattered in the diaspora. In Erased from Space and Consciousness, Noga Kadman, an Israeli researcher and licensed tour guide who deals with the hidden layers of the landscape of historical Palestine, critically and thoroughly investigates these villages. She focuses on human rights in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through exploring the encounter between Israelis and Palestinians in the landscape and history of the country.

Kadman highlights the aggressive approaches to the process of village depopulation and investigates the reactions and perceptions of Israelis to the act of depopulation – and often erasure – of Palestinian villages after 1948, as well as the strategies used and their justification. Kadman’s vast experience, along with the information she gathered during her extensive research based on official archives, records, and publications, led her to identify several significant aspects of the depopulation process: the destruction of the tangible historical remains of the villages, the politically strategic decision to replace the Arab names of geographical and historical features with Hebrew names after the establishment of the state of Israel, the process of creating new official Hebrew maps, and the way history is presented to visitors of tourist sites that contain remains of Palestinian villages. In addition, Kadman explores the perceptions of Jewish communities that were established after 1948 on top of the ruins of these villages or inside the empty Arab houses.

All these factors reveal a pattern of marginalization and erasure, and highlight the complex phenomenon of personal and collective memory and representation. At the same time, Kadman exposes the consequences that this has had on the awareness and consciousness of the Israeli community. The systematic efforts to hide traces of the villages are but a crucial part of the conflict, as they mostly convey political statements through which occupying powers declare ownership of the occupied places.

Although the villages were considered undesired elements in the landscape that Israel wanted to create in the newly established state, one can still see remains and traces of the life that once flourished here: walls, glassless windows, water springs, trees, and cemeteries, among others. The countless efforts to erase the past and rewrite history have failed in the face of truth. This valuable work provides a fundamental understanding of the history of the country and the impact of erasure on both the Palestinian and Israeli narratives in the contested land.
Nearly all the depopulated Palestinian villages were demolished in order to erase them from the landscape. However, most of the village sites are located today in open areas, and in many some remains of the village can be seen.¹ Over the years, in many of these areas forests were planted, parks were established, national parks and nature reserves were declared, and hiking paths were paved.