

She gave no sign of anger at the government, and when I probed to see whom she blamed for her suffering, she said mildly: “It’s God who takes my children.”

That may be a little unfair to God. An International Monetary Fund report last year noted that Angola has one of the richest pools of natural wealth per person in Africa, yet the country has done much less than its peers to assist ordinary people. And when the I.M.F. reviewed Angola’s books from 2007-10, it initially found \$32 billion missing.

“Government corruption at all levels was endemic,” the United States State Department said of Angola in its annual human rights report in 2013.

Angola is ranked 161 out of 175 countries by Transparency International in its “corruption perceptions index.” The World Bank’s “Doing Business” series ranks Angola 187 out of 189 countries in enforcing contracts.

This is a global problem, of course, not just Angola’s. Two new books, “Thieves of State” by Sarah Chayes and “The Looting Machine” by Tom Burgis, document the way corruption is a catastrophe in many poor countries. Angola is simply an extreme example.

This corruption is also a reason 150,000 children die each year in Angola before the age of 5. The health budget is systematically pillaged: de Moraes, the Angolan journalist, cites \$58 million that was allocated to renovate a particular hospital — and then pretty much vanished.

The differences between dos Santos and Fernandes are vast, but there is a wrenching shared interest in the oil industry. Dos Santos has monetized it, and when I asked Fernandes if she knew that Angola was rich with oil she was a bit confused by the question but said eagerly that she, too, values gasoline when she can afford to buy a swallow.

“I put it in my mouth,” she said, “to dull the pain from my teeth.”

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