

Table 20. Comparison of Prices of Selected Food Products at Abu Jahal (el-Obeid), Abu Haraz, and el-Geifil

<u>Commodities</u>	<u>Abu Jahal</u>	<u>Abu Haraz</u>	<u>el-Geifil</u>
tea <sup>a</sup>	0.150/wagii9	0.120/wagii9	0.125/wagii9
coffee beans	0.190/wagii9	0.180/wagii9	0.180/wagii9
sugar	0.400/nus rooṭl	0.450/nus rooṭl	0.350/nus rooṭl
sesame oil	0.650/rooṭl	0.700/rooṭl	0.700/rooṭl
feterita	0.700/mid	0.900/mid	0.900/mid
onion	0.250/rooṭl	0.200/rooṭl	0.250/rooṭl
Totals	2.340	2.550	2.505

<sup>a</sup>The prices for tea are not fully comparable. The tea sold in the shop at Abu Jahal is Indian; the teas sold in Abu Haraz and el-Geifil are Ugandan.

Comparing the totals of the columns of figures which represent the market basket for each location, el-Obeid market prices are predictably lower than those found in either village, but the effective mark-up is not extreme--9% in the case of Abu Haraz and 7% in the case of el-Geifil. An impressionistic inspection of the rest of the market basket data which we have suggests that this pattern of moderate mark-up by village merchants generally holds true. Once on the shelf a commodity may remain several months before it is sold. Village merchants, of course, buy their stock from wholesalers and economize transportation costs by shipping crops to el-Obeid on the same truck that hauls the provisions they buy. In these cases, the earnings from crop sales provide the capital for restocking the shop. This activity of resowing earnings in new investments is called bighlib ("turning the money over").

A merchant depends on maintaining the goodwill of a clientele of regular customers. Subtle forms of competition develop between merchants, but anything so blatant as advertising is absent. For example, we found a merchant in Umm Ramad who had lowered the price of chewing gum and candy in an attempt to lure children away from the other shops. The implications of this ploy become clear when it is realized that children are important buyers of the household's daily needs. Merchants value customers who come from neighboring villages and compete for their business. This pattern stems from the fact that the presence in the village of a flour mill attracts families from neighboring villages to have their grain ground into flour once or twice per week. This provides the opportunity for the visitors to buy at village shops outside their own village. Merchants encourage this practice by showing the visitors their hospitality. It is usual to find a rukuuba (millet stalk shelter) adjacent to the shop where the travelers may rest in the shade. The merchant provides drinking water and perhaps tea or coffee. He may also offer groundnuts, wild fruits, or biscuits to snack on. If it