

is meal time, the visitors may be invited to join the merchant in eating 9asiida and mulaah,<sup>63</sup> which has been prepared by the merchant's wife and carried to the shop by his children. Another kind of competition has to do with the merchant's readiness to make loans and his leniency on repayment. Indeed, it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that a merchant who fails to extend credit to his customers is soon bereft of his clientele. Still another form of competition is to offer customers a price for their cash crops which is slightly above the general price prevailing at the other shops in the village. All such strategies will be for naught if the merchant does not secure a dependable relationship with a truck owner to transport goods at a competitive price.<sup>64</sup> Even if this requirement is met the merchant may still find that his costs press too hard to offer better prices to farmers for their crops. Precisely at this sticky point crop smuggling becomes attractive to many merchants: farmers receive better prices; merchants receive higher profits; excessive costs are charged to the government's lost revenues.

The commercial profiles of the smaller villages look much alike. There is little diversity of function. Most of the shops primarily sell groceries. The storekeeper may operate a sewing machine in the winter season when families have money to spend and sell cloth. In the smaller villages, merchants may use their own shops to store the crops they buy in exchange for consumer goods but it is also common to have a separate storage building, usually a millet stalk shed or hut. Sometimes, several merchants share a storehouse together, or the owner rents space to other merchants. Often, however, money does not change hands in such arrangements. Merchants maintain generally good relations with one another and hold to the principle of "scratch my back and I'll scratch yours."

The contrast to this which a larger village presents is immediate and striking. Economic diversity increases as the village becomes larger. Table 21 illustrates this in a comparison of commercial structures at Abu Haraz and Umm Ramad markets. As the table shows Abu Haraz is developing an almost urban character with many specialized shops. It is also interesting to note that the biggest merchant in the village has no agricultural holdings. His earnings come entirely from his shop, crop buying, livestock and his trucks. Umm Ramad represents more nearly the norm for a large village market. The economic diversity of commercial structures does not extend to service trades (e.g., radio repair, barber, carpenter) as seen at Abu Haraz. Further evidence of the urban character of Abu Haraz can be gleaned from the fact that 25% of the storage buildings and 27% of the grocery and grocery/cloth shops are not owner-occupied but rented. By contrast in the more rural Umm Ramad, only 16% of the storage buildings and 12% of the grocery and grocery/cloth shops are rented rather than owner-occupied. It should also be noted that absentee landlords of commercial buildings are more prevalent in Abu Haraz than in Umm Ramad.

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<sup>63</sup>The most common dish of this rural area. 9asiida is a thick porridge made from millet or sorghum. Mulaah is a sauce made from meat, whey or cowpeas.

<sup>64</sup>Wealthy merchants solve the problem by buying their own truck.