

relatively high for the season is not as high as it will get. The merchant may store his purchases until the day that a favorable median price appears. In this case, the merchants would have waited only two weeks for a favorable price increase for sesame. But this strategy nets a low rate of return (e.g., less than 12% expressed as an annual rate of return). Higher profits are possible only by mixing contraband crops with produce that is purchased in a government market and taxed accordingly. Gum that carries a proper tax certification, for example, is a favored crop for concealing contraband.⁷⁶ It cannot be stored for a long time because it will lose up to 10% of its weight. Thus, when gum is sent to el-Obeid for sale a number of sacks of contraband sesame can be put on the bottom of the load. The contraband will pass undetected unless an inspection is made of the entire load, sack by sack.⁷⁷

The Shiishna System

Much of what has been said, or implied, about the significance of smuggling in the mizaan marketing system applies equally to the shiishna system.⁷⁸ Only in shiishna there is a legal procedure for assessing taxes which results in an underestimation of the values of crops. Probably this is well because the shiishna system operates in remote markets which might not attract agents and assemblers to purchase the crops if there was no such built-in incentive.

El-Geifil crop market illustrates how the shiishna system works. There are two shopkeepers and two other crop buyers in the village who are the agents of a truck-owner assembler from a neighboring village.⁷⁹ The merchants at el-Geifil buy crops from the farmers in the weekly market in exchange for consumer goods that the merchants have in stock. This year, the buyers and merchants started out paying 0.800/mid for sesame in October, and the price increased to 1.100/mid in February. The assembler buys the goods from his agents for the prevailing price plus a commission of 0.020/mid for sesame and 0.020/rootl for gum and karkadee. (Groundnuts are not an important crop in this market.) Thus, the crop buyers and local merchants can increase their profits by storing the crops for a period of several months. For example, if a merchant paid 0.90/mid in November for sesame and held it until January when the price was 1.00/mid, he would earn 0.120/mid profit.⁸⁰ When the assembler buys the crops from el-Geifil merchants, the sale is recorded by the market clerk. A standard formula estimates the weight for assessing the gibaana tax: one sack of sesame = 1.80 kantars; one sack of gum = 1.80 kantars; one sack of karkadee = 0.35 kantars. A value estimator is then used for assessing the 9ushuur tax: sesame is valued at 13.000/kantar and karkadee is valued at 25.000/kantar; 9ushuur is not

⁷⁶Partly this is because no 9ushuur tax is charged in the case of gum.

⁷⁷This is a hard, time-consuming task. The police almost never require it.

⁷⁸We don't find this a proper forum for discussing crop smuggling in detail. Our aim is to suggest its importance while safeguarding the confidentiality of our sources of information.

⁷⁹The agents say that this man is their relative but they are hazy about the exact genealogical relationship.

⁸⁰This includes the commission, storage costs are nil since the assembler provides the local merchants and buyers with sacks.