

FISHERWOMEN

Throughout the twentieth century, one would often see women with baskets on their heads walking barefoot along the roads between the coast and the inland areas, announcing the arrival of fresh fish. These women were popularly known as *pescadoras* (fisherwomen), *pescaderas* (fishwives), *barqueras* (boatwomen) or *vendedoras ambulantes* (pedlars).

Their occupation was a feminine family business, handed down from mothers to daughters. From a very young age, girls would accompany their mothers as they hawked their wares, and at the age of 12 or 13 they would start walking the roads alone. Their male relatives spent all night out fishing, and at dawn the fishwives went down to the shore and waited for the boats to come in laden with the eagerly anticipated catch, which they would then sell or trade.

The fish was prepared and placed in baskets beneath a layer of moss to keep them fresh and a kerchief over that. The women then set out on the roads leading inland, with the heavy baskets balanced on their heads, walking barefoot to preserve the only pair of shoes they owned. Upon entering a village, they would put up tarpaulins to make their wares look more appealing, and when they cried "Fresh fish!", the villagers emerged from their homes. In those commercial transactions, they would often trade their fish for other products: potatoes, fruit, vegetables, grain, meat and eggs, among other things. In addition to fish, they carried makeshift scales in their baskets: two weight pans, a nylon string and stones weighing between a quarter kilo and one kilo that served as weights.

The fishwives of Tenerife made their way to every corner of the island, from the shores of Arona to Vilaflor, from Punta del Hidalgo to La Laguna, and from Puerto de la Cruz to the entire valley of La Orotava and the neighbouring villages. This constant to-and-fro was also an effective communication network, sharing news with the residents of populated coastal and inland areas.

This traditional occupation disappeared in the twentieth century with the introduction of new business methods, food and health regulations, refrigerated fish and the fact that younger generations had little interest in learning a job that meant a life of poverty, early mornings, long walks and exposure to the harsh elements.