

- **Zozabarrak**
- **Launch**
- **07-04-2025**
- **Donostia Municipal Library**

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A seemingly mundane event—a change of classroom—ends up disrupting the life of June, the novel’s protagonist, when her new classmates begin to bully her. At first she is unable to find refuge anywhere, and she’ll feel overwhelmed by the suffering that will permeate her entire life: at school and at home; during the day and at night.

Bullying is a nightmare for many students.

According to a study published by the Complutense University of Madrid in 2023, at least two children or adolescents per classroom are victims of this type of violence.

Data from the Basque Government for the 2022-23 school year reported 218 cases of bullying, an increase of 39% over the previous school year. These are official data, denoting cases that have been corroborated. Considering that a third of victims keep silent about their suffering, it’s not unreasonable to think that the real number is even higher.

The number increases further when cyberbullying is considered. A joint study by Puntueus and Cyberzaintza produced educational videos that put the focus on the aggressors. In one video, a teenage girl acknowledges that all teens, shielded by anonymity, have committed some type of digital violence.

And so adolescents like June must endure the smirks and hurtful laughter, the jokes and threats, that their classmates subject them to on a daily basis. Every day, they hear others making fun of their body or their personality. Every day, they are shoved or beat up at school. And that means that every day, they feel lonely, sad and afraid. Day after day, each one endless.

Every morning, when they go to class, they see the knowing glances that protect the bullies; they also suffer from the silence and cruelty of those who ignore them, condemning them to the sidelines. There are many who feel excluded, invisible, every day. Because in this nightmare, the bully is defended while the victim is made to feel guilty. And to feel loneliness, sadness and terror every endless day.

Starlings move in large flocks called “murmurations.” We too are social beings. As John Donne proclaimed: “No man is an island, entire of itself. Each is a piece of the continent, a part of the

main.” The hypnotic dance of the starlings seems incredible and marvelous to us; nevertheless, we cannot ignore that each act of flight has its own particular beauty, even the solitary flights of birds of prey. According to the 6<sup>th</sup> Survey (“Student opinion”) jointly run by the ANAR Foundation and Mutua Madrileña, 47% of students do nothing when witnessing bullying. My own experience would put that at 90%. The vast majority.

When in flight, a starling synchronizes its movements with seven of its closest fellow birds. Most will feel quite cold when separated from the group. In a case of bullying that happened in my last year as a teacher, a boy from Astigarraga stood up to some bullies. It was an act that was courageous and unforgettable, especially for the victim, and carried out by a boy who was kind, compassionate and independent-minded. His action drew attention to the passivity and cruelty of the others.

A few years back, Uxue, an editor at Erein, gave me a book called *The Wall*, which had been translated into Basque by Naroa Zubillaga. I know that I will return often to Marlen Haushofer’s forest. In this beautiful and surprising book, we find the following passage:

“This autumn a white crow appeared. It always flies behind the others and it perches alone on a tree that the others reject. I cannot understand why the other crows do not love it. For me, the bird is beautiful; for its companions, however, it’s a despised being. I see it completely alone, huddled in its fir tree, closely watching over the meadow. An insignificant being that shouldn’t exist, the white crow. It stays until the flock takes off, and then I take it some food. It’s so docile that I am able to get close. Sometimes, when it spies me, it even comes down to the ground. I don’t know why the flock has marginalized it, and it knows no other existence. They will always reject it, and it will feel so alone that it will fear its own companions more than it will fear humans. Perhaps, they despise it so much that they don’t deign to kill it. Every day I wait for the white crow and try to attract it, and it watches me intently with its reddish eyes. I can do almost nothing for it. Maybe my leftovers are maintaining a life that shouldn’t be extended. I wish, nevertheless, for the white crow to live, and I sometimes dream that another lives in the forest and the two meet. I doubt it’s possible, but I fervently wish it were.”

The US government has stated that it will deny funding to universities if they do not renounce their DEI policies, policies that promote diversity, equity and inclusion. Such officials are insensitive to the fact that in denying the differences among human beings, they are showing disregard for diversity, the basis of all democratic and just societies.