



Research Article

Loving and Terrible Mother: An Archetypal Redefinition of African Motherhood in *Beloved*

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Abstract

The memories of past experiences have an unconscious influence on the present. In her novel *Beloved*, Toni Morrison vividly portrays the atrocities of slavery, shedding light on the enduring psychic wounds inflicted upon subjugated Black women and their motherhood. This study explores the embedded memories, trauma, and dehumanization that control and distort the ability of Black individuals to respond to the human experiences of maternal bonds. While existing literature has extensively explored motherhood, a gap remains in understanding the archetypal development within the fragmented psyche of tormented mothers. Drawing from Carl Jung and Eric Neumann's collective unconscious and mother archetype concept, this interdisciplinary research aims to identify and examine the dual nature of motherhood - the loving and the terrible. By analyzing the reasons behind this duality, we seek to redefine motherhood, considering the exhibition of two contradictory natures among oppressed mothers.

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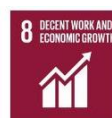
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Collective Unconscious, the Archetype and the Images

Numerous people have attempted to unearth the cause and effect of human behaviour, as it is precious and complicated to understand. Carl Jung, one of the proponents of the Collective Unconscious and the archetypes, delineates the psychic conditions that influence individual behaviours. The psyche disposition of an individual is determined through instinct by the images formed in the unconscious mind in the form of primordial images unique to the individual, and the images also emerge through conscious experiences (1980, pp.5-7, 153). Hillman personifies archetypes and considers the personified archetypes as Gods, which become instinctual patterns of behaviour and further develop into persons with each consciousness and are indispensable to the psyche's life, just as God sustain the universe (1975, pp. 35-36). Robertson confirms that the two sides of the archetypes are archetypal images and instinctual behaviour and affirms the presence of archetypes in the human mind through complex behaviour (2016, p.178). The archetypes activate through images, creating memories that lie deep and surface upon encountering the conscious experience; Jung indicates that the archetypes' alteration is possible through conscious awareness, and Neumann believes that archetypes affect the individual's moods, irrespective of the acceptance of human consciousness (2015, p. 3-4). The universality of the primordial images that derive from the collective unconscious develops into personal archetypes based on culture, myths, and experience.

The experiences of African mothers under subjugation and inhuman treatment significantly affect their psyche and subsequent behaviours, particularly in child-rearing. The consequences of slavery, patriarchy, and systematic discrimination have left an indelible mark on African communities, especially Black mothers, shaping their actions and behaviours. According to Collins, the ideology of the slave era facilitated socially constructed controlling images to maintain a subordination of Black womanhood serving the interests of the prevailing group. (2000, p. 72) The images of brutal enslavement evoke a deep-seated trauma and agony of Black mothers dominating their psychic responses to their conduct towards their children, thus tainting their experiences of motherhood for Africans, like any other, uphold motherhood as the highest form in the universe. This impact mirrors the harsh domination imposed by the White masters and the severe oppression by enslaved women.

African Motherhood

Every person receives vital energy from the mother, as she becomes the life source for the initial stages of a child, the life itself for the child with all her characteristics, faults, and merits (Johnson, 1994, p. 9). All cultures uphold motherhood with no exceptions to African culture, which highly values motherhood. While analysing the traumas of African Caribbean Mothers, Bush declares that for African women, the role of motherhood is significant, representing the ultimate fulfilment of female identity and fulfilment (2010, p. 72). In the history of Blacks, motherhood has been of central importance in the philosophies of people of African descent (Collins, 2000, p. 174).

In explaining Black motherhood, Collins indicates two distinct perspectives among Black American women; one group perceives motherhood as troublesome and burdensome, viewing it as a force of oppression that restricts their freedom, manipulates their labour, imposes regulations, and

crushes their creative expressions. Moreover, another segment regards motherhood as a foundation for self-realisation, a source of status within the Black community, and a stimulus for social advancement and progression. These divergent and contradictory assumptions thrive within African American communities, families and individuals (2000, p. 176-177), contributing to the complexities surrounding Black motherhood. The optimal conditions surrounding motherhood among Afro-American women are highlighted by the paradoxical interplay of good and bad traits, for the enslaved women navigate the difficulties of childbirth and child-rearing within the oppressive and traumatic conditions of a racist and sexist world (Bush, 2010, p. 70). O'Reilly advocates the reasons contributing to the impaired maternal roles of black women, crediting disruptions in motherhood and maternal functions to factors such as migration, hegemony, and slavery (2004, p. 73). Wike highlights the impact of slavery as the reason for Blacks' deprivation of their selfhood and motherhood (2017, p. 6).

However, the institution of slavery in American colonies throughout the 17th and 19th centuries precipitated drastic changes in the lives of Africans, especially African mothers. The slave trade transported enslaved people, which involved cruelty and abuse that greatly impacted maternal roles. Enslaved people, especially mothers, suffered at the hands of enslavers and encountered dissolution of familial ties, separation from children, denial of reproductive choices and hardships. Bush affirms that enslaved women, other than being "stripped of their sex", were denied the opportunity for motherhood, and if they did have children, their offspring were seized as captives (2010, p. 69). Despite the adversities encountered by their White masters, African enslaved mothers continued procuring the lineage. Bush assumed that throughout the plantation history, enslaved women transmitted the ancestral legacy carried on by the African mothers in imparting terms of culture and memory (2010, p. 69).

Beloved and the Mother Archetype

Toni Morrison, a renowned African-American writer prominent in the late twentieth century, wrote *Beloved*, a seminal historical novel focusing on reconstructing the past. The novel delves into intricate ways in which memories ingrained in the lives of enslaved African women control their responses to fundamental human experiences of love, sexual attraction, and motherhood. Morrison analyses the psychological and emotional ramifications of slavery, attributing the fragmentation of the individual's external world to internal traumas inflicted by the oppressive system. The power of her narrative lies in Morrison's ability to create a compelling curiosity about Sethe's actions.

After the Civil War, the narrative *Beloved* unfolds just before Paul D arrives to stay with Sethe and Denver at 124; however, the story is unveiled through recollection and memories. Sethe, a formerly enslaved in Kentucky, endures brutal treatment and torture under the control of White masters, who subject her to rape, steal her milk, and severe beatings. Fleeing slavery, Sethe escapes to Ohio, a free state. Nevertheless, after twenty-eight days of bliss, she is encountered by the arrival of the school teacher and his nephews, who seek to reclaim her under the Fugitive Slave Act. Foreseeing the unexplainable slavery, Sethe commits an act of parental filicide, resulting in the haunting of an angry poltergeist, which drives away her two sons and destroys any semblance of

normalcy in her relationships. Finally, the rescue comes with the intervention of women from Ohio and Mr. Bodwin.

The concept of the mother holds universal appeal, with the initial image of the infant often associated with the mother archetype; Jung associates all the images and symbols exhibiting fertility and fruitfulness to the mother archetypes. Furthermore, Jung affirms the dual nature of the mother archetype, encompassing both negative and positive aspects; positive aspects represent growth and fertility, while negative characteristics signify the dark, hidden, poisonous side of the mother archetype; the dual combines present the mother as both loving and terrible (Jung 1980, pp. 156, 158). Neumann further develops Jung's ideas, depicting the mother archetype into three distinct forms: the good mother, the terrible mother, and the good-bad mother. He illustrates the emergence of the good-bad mother, depicting the great mother archetype's negative and positive qualities. (2015, p. 21).

Moreover, the mother archetype takes on a unique form for each individual. According to Collins, Black women's efforts to establish a physical and psychic foundation for their children can influence their parenting approaches and the passionate fervour of Black motherhood (2000, p. 187). Morrison, through Baby Suggs, depicts the mother-in-law of Sethe to illustrate the tragic effect of motherhood under enslavement. Despite being freed in her old age by her son Halle Suggs, also Sethe's husband, she endures the sorrow of separation from all her eight children. Her maternal spirit is evident as she opens her home to the community, but the heartbreak from those severed bonds persists. She says, "I had eight. Every one of them gone away from me. Four taken, four chased"(Morrison, 1987, p. 6). Baby Suggs thus encapsulates the emotional and physical pain inflicted on African mothers.

The mother archetype assumes a unique form for Sethe's mother, whose experience as an enslaved woman subjugates her to the harsh realities of slave life. She represents the savages endured by enslaved women whose bodies were chopped up with no scope for recognition. Sethe's mother's repeated rapes by the White crew demonstrate the disturbing realities of Black's mother's enslaved life, one that results in multiple pregnancies. Moreover, she denounces her motherhood to the babies born out of violence by drowning or abandoning them in the wilderness (Morrison, 1987, pp.77-78); her denial and desecration of motherhood reflect the manifestation of a terrible mother under bondage.

However, Sethe's birth to a Black man stimulates a different response to motherhood for Sethe's mother; she exhibits possessiveness by branding on the body of Sethe as a sign of mother's love to recognise her as her own. "right on her rib was a circle and a cross burnt right in the skin...if something happens to me and you cannot tell me by face, you can know me by this mark" (Morrison, 1987, p.76). Her protective instincts of marking reveal the redefinition of motherhood in her own terms and magnify the loving aspects of the mother archetype. Despite slavery's disruption of motherhood, Sethe's mother fights to assert access to her relationship with her daughter. Her actions magnify the maternal love of an enslaved woman under bondage. Ghiassi Zarj & Mousavi rightly affirm that the branding on Sethe's body reflects her mother's profound love; despite the limited physical presence of her mother, it does not diminish her love for Sethe in contrast to other mothers (2024, p. 135).

Although Sethe's mother shows her affection towards Sethe, her act of discarding other babies without an ounce of regret unveils the psychological trauma and aversion stemming from the experiences of rape, resulting in the consequences of renouncing motherhood, thereby disclosing the terrible nature of motherhood. As Hooks affirms, the experience of slave ship has a tremendous psychological impact on Black women and men (1999, p. 20); her exhibition of the mother archetype is influenced by her exposure to the brutality of slavery, which leads her to discriminate against her children fathered by the White men and a Black man. Her abandonment displays how the slave experiences form the perceptions of a mother, revealing the complexities of Black motherhood with all the multitudes of maternal responsibilities, further highlighting the dual nature inherent in the great mother archetype, indicating the difficulties encountered by Black mothers during slavery.

Unlike her mother, Sethe, the protagonist of the novel *Beloved*, faces unique challenges, depicting the individualised suffering of the enslaved and their responses to motherhood. Sethe's attempts to escape captivity while still pregnant illustrate the desperation to gain freedom for her children. Her definition of motherhood exposes a unique conception of the mother archetype. The developmental process of loving and terrible aspects of the mother archetype is as follows.

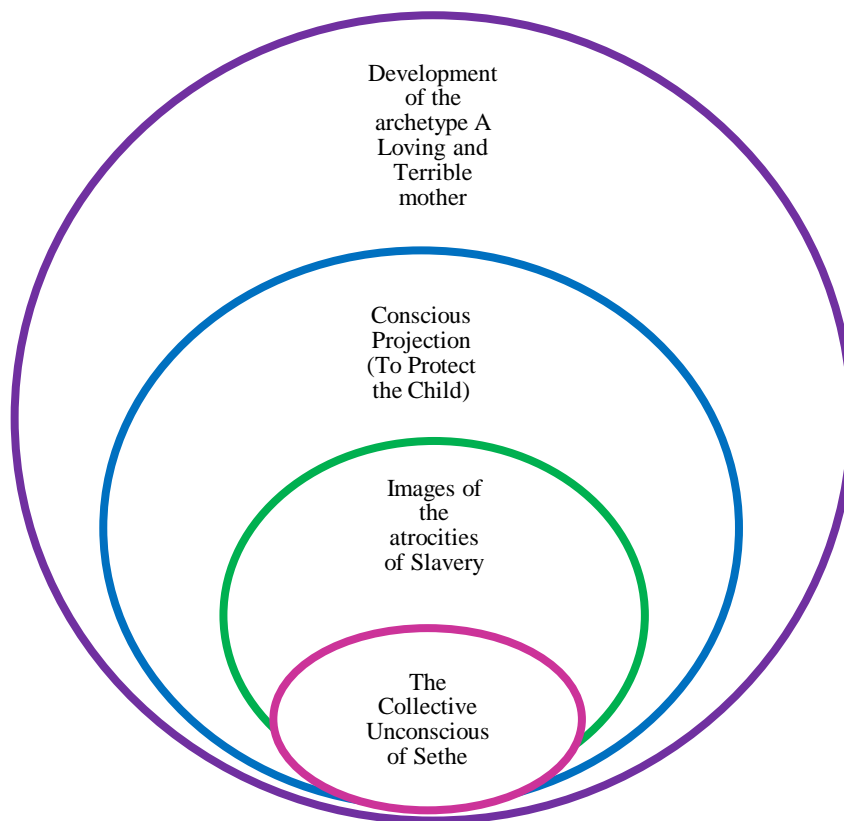


Figure1

The Developmental Process of Sethe, a Loving and Terrible Mother Archetype

Figure one demonstrates Sethe's psychic process and the development of the loving and terrible mother archetype. Like the other Black women, Sethe initiates her journey with the images of the

collective unconscious, the collective images of race, gender, and Black oppression formulated through the enduring effects of the long-standing slave system. Krumholz reasons that memories of Sethe continue to exist as remnants of historical and individual recollection processes rooted in the remnants of slavery (1992, p. 395). The horrifying reminiscence of her life in slavery, characterised by enduring physical, mental, and psychological torture, coupled with her overwhelming love and the constant dread of the fate of her children under the tyranny of the White masters, compel Sethe to commit parental filicide, transforms her into a figure of terrible mother. Despite her actions, Sethe mirrors the essence of a good mother, compelled by her intense urge to protect children from the horrors of bondage, revealing her unwavering commitment to the welfare of her children in the face of adversity. Sethe's character represents the many Black women entangled in the intricateness of motherhood in a society represented by brutal oppression.

Sethe a 'Loving and Terrible Mother '

The terrible images of slavery imprinted in the mind of the enslaved mother, Sethe, necessitate her to commit infanticide, challenging the societal and religious idea of a good mother. Simultaneously, her act of filial maternal love serves as a justification for her actions. In her novel 'Beloved,' Morrison dissolves the idea of a good mother by society by portraying Sethe, who commits infanticide, alongside her own mother, who abandons her babies in the water. Neumann considers the womb of a mother to be the primordial symbol of the great mother (2015, p. 158), asserting that the great mother signifies both the terrible and loving natures of motherhood. The dual composition of motherhood, representing both pure love and the potential hindrance to the child's development, becomes evident in Sethe's heinous act. Her unconscious response to the trauma of slavery and its profound psychological impact illuminates the emergence of the archetype of the mother, who embodies terrible and loving qualities. Sethe's action offers a compelling redefinition and a nuanced understanding of African motherhood in the socio-historical context.

Sengupta voices the loss of Sethe's joys of motherhood, leaving her infertile; this infertility is the infertility of the soul, mind, and body (2021, p. 204). Jung analyses the lack of internal fulfilment of the portion of libido that drives an individual to seek fulfilment in the external object (1977, p. 254). The deprivation of the love of the family, coupled with an internal longing to provide that love through the protection of her children, promotes Sethe to imagine the probable dangers and the pathetic trauma her children may face at the hands of the school teacher, intimidate her into adopting the persona of a terrible mother.

With the psychological fracture in her psyche, Sethe struggles with controlling her emotions, ultimately resulting in her taking a crucial step of denying motherhood by brutally killing her baby Beloved, thus becoming a figure of a terrible mother. Allen suggests that the inter-war writers emphasised the darker side of mother love, depicting the mothers as lawmakers deciding their children's future, thus hindering their daughters' development (2005, p. 187). Neumann correlates the pessimism of the terrible mother with a monster and suggests that death is the contrasting representation of women's perspectives and destruction, danger, and distress. Even these seem unresponsive in the existence of the dark and terrible mother (2015, p. 148-149).

Furthermore, Jung believes that the mother plays a subsequent part in children's unconscious minds. The image of the mother in the psyche has several different but fundamental unconscious contents in it. The archetype of the anima, the first incarnation of the mother, embodies the whole unconsciously. Hence, the regression leads straight to the mother; in reality, she is the gateway to the unconscious, into the maternal domain. (1977, p.508). The collective memories of slavery alter Sethe's perspective on life, leading to disproportionate actions that implicate the lives of her children, and her impulsive decision to kill Beloved also instills fear in the other children. Her scars display on a broader canopy the archetypal development of the terrible and loving mother.

There have been changes in the idea of mother love as the mother's psychological state affects the child's development. The dilemma exemplifies the external factors that force the mothers to abandon their children and the maternal responsibilities resulting from the denial of their mother's abandonment. Caesar indicated that Sethe's infanticide prefigured her mother (1994, p. 114). Jung draws a connection between the disturbances in the person and the infantile neuroses (1980, p. 161) for the images or the 'primordial images' as he calls them, created in childhood work in the mind and affect the psyche of the human, producing the archetype. The psychic process of the images develops into archetypes, and as Neumann rightly affirms, the mood, the emotions, the negative, and the positive responses are expressions of the effect of the archetype (2015, p. 4-5). The development of the mother archetype results in the disposition of the past memoirs, making a mother waver to being a great mother.

Sethe struggles to succeed between two minds, as Jung names the human and the divine. In desperation to save her child from enslavement, Sethe kills her and destroys her child's life. In doing so, she becomes a terrible mother. Sethe justifies by saying, "It is my job to know what is and to keep them away from what I know is terrible. I did that (Morrison, 1987, p.117)". While analysing the novels of Toni Morrison, Grewal indicates the actions of Sethe to that of the slaveholders who subject their enslaved to a slow social death and Sethe to physical death (1998, p. 97). In her justification for murdering the child, Sethe treats her children as her property, disposing of the children according to her judgment without any consent from her child, exploiting the mother's rights just like the slaveholders, who capitalise on enslaved people. The slave community made efforts to sustain families' offspring despite the enslaver's persecution. The difference in Sethe's counter-response to slavery isolates her from the folk. Women openly despised her, and Sethe's refusal to abide by the norms of society raised resentment within the community, resulting in a strained relationship between the individual and the community. (Grewal, 1998, p. 97).

Psychic dysfunction corresponds with the development of personality. The guilt of infanticide makes Sethe psychologically indifferent to the others around her. The recurring images of the unconscious mind manifested in actions, in her overly caring for Beloved rather than Denver, the living child. Denver always felt lonely growing up, especially after her brothers left home (Morrison, 1987, p. 25). The devastating pain of the emotions of killing her child disturbed Sethe's psyche. She succumbed to the reminiscence of her memories and indulged in Beloved, her ghost child. Humans strive to recreate the past (Muckenhoupt, 1997, p. 123). She tries to compensate for her guilt to the ghost child by capitulating to the ghost's demands. The preoccupation with losing one child made her lose the other three children; the two boys, Howard and Buglar, run away from home, "and Denver, though she lived in the house, felt alone, and the thought of her

mother killing Beloved frightened her. She says, "I know she killed one of her daughters and tender as she is with me, I am scared of her because of it" (Morrison, 1987, p.252). Sethe's dual nature of loving and terrible gives no comfort to Denver. She expresses her fear, which makes her feel trapped in the house, observing the yard to avoid the repetition of infanticide. In Jung's opinion, when external objective influences are absent, the individual is compelled to find a substitute within their own psyche (1977, p. 253). Sethe's constant longing for Beloved compels her to seek satisfaction in caring for the ghost Beloved. Moreover, the trauma and guilt of Sethe further externalised into what Andrea O'Reilly names 'the pre-Oedipal mother-daughter symbiosis.' where Sethe over-identifies with her daughter Beloved, and it becomes impossible for her to deflect from Beloved and consequently makes it difficult for the psyche to change (2004, p. 84-85).

Moreover, Sethe's connection with her own psyche, her children, and the wider community splintered, and her presence terrifies everyone. Sethe failed to embody the image of a nurturing mother and instead represented a more fearsome maternal figure. Hillman explains the archetypal influence on the aesthetic judgments of individual attitudes and actions (1975, p.182). The experience of constant terror and miseries of slavery drove Sethe to devour her child and thus personify herself as a terrible mother.

Despite being viewed as a terrible mother, Sethe still retains the attributes of a great nurturing mother. As Jenifer declares, motherhood enables profound affection between parent and child, even amidst struggles (2014, p.119). In his book 'A Politics of The Heart,' O'Reilly demonstrates the nurturing of Black children by their Black mothers against an unjust society that denies the needs of Black mothers and children (2004, p. 4). Slavery-contaminated motherhood for the natural ownership of children is reversed in slavery, for enslavers took the possession of the slave children, and the mother owns no rights over her children (Caesar, 1994, p.114,117). Jung assumed a potential association between the mother and the anima, which is not oriented to the exterior world and thus remains untainted by it. Instead, she is turned inward towards the internal solar force, the archetype of transcendent wholeness of the self. (1977, p. 497). Despite lacking legal rights, Sethe fostered affection for her children. Her deep love and attachment to her offspring are visible in her reminiscence with Beloved about the cherished memories of Howard, Buglar and the baby during their time at Sweet Home, where they experienced liberty under the supervision of Mr Garner: "I Could hear Howard and Buglar laughing down... you had the sweetest face" (Morrison, 1987, p. 236). She often cherishes the fond memories with her children in her dreams. "I used to see them in my dreams, laughing, their short fat legs running up the hill" (Morrison, 1987, p.236). The act of infanticide signifies the psychological trauma of experiencing motherhood under slavery, for she understands the brutality of the slave treatment. Grewal justifies that Morrison portrayed the mother's deed as a heroic act of resistance, one among many that constituted the quotidian experience of enslaved people (1998, p.101). Understanding the cruel nature of slavery and seeking to protect her child from further violation, Sethe commits infanticide, but her constant preoccupation with her deceased daughter and intense grief explain her unending attachment when Beloved returns. She says, "I couldn't let all that go back to where it was, and I couldn't let her nor any of them live under schoolteacher" (Morrison, 1987, p.200).

While analysing Black motherhood, O'Reilly indicates that Black mothers, regardless of their struggles, are obliged to mother their children in an antagonistic environment, frequently striving

to supply the protection, nourishment and cultural foundation vital for a child's wellbeing (2004, p. 117). Morrison, in *Beloved*, explores the bond between mother and children; it portrays Sethe as a desperate slave mother who tries to protect her children from the dreadfulness of slavery. Neumann accentuates that the reshaping of a woman into a new archetype constellation transpires during childbirth (2015, p. 32). The mother's maternal instincts speculate her against the school teacher, and she plunges into action, sending her three children to her mother-in-law Baby Suggs's house. Moreover, after knowing the arrival of the school teacher to reclaim her and the children, she takes the drastic step of killing her child, *Beloved*, displaying her powerful maternal affection to protect her children. Though the violence Sethe exhibits is devastating, from her perspective, it symbolises her desperation to save her enslavement. Khati confirms the act of murdering Sethe of her child *Beloved* to the brutal and inhuman treatment experienced by Sethe in the hands of her white masters, who subjected her to frequent rapes and untold humiliations. Sethe prevents her children, the most precious possessions, the best and cleanest things, from going through the same turbulence (2021, p. 180). The mother's love and instinct preclude repeating the ordeal and, to shield them from the gruesomeness, lead her to commit the heinous crime.

The psychic power to resist a mother's emotional pain is devastating. Mother's milk connects babies with their mothers. Sethe repeatedly mentions her milk being stolen, indicating her love for her children and the denial of her right to mothering. The victim of slavery, fearing the same fate for her children, Sethe commits parental filicide. Because of this, she was imprisoned and ostracised by the Black Community as it is a crime and unnatural for a Black Woman to kill one's child. The ultimate love of Sethe is evident in the sacrifice of her self-worth to the engraver who sought sexual favours from Sethe to engrave *Beloved*'s tomb in the form of her body. The helplessness of poverty and her desire to properly lay the dead compelled her to accept the undue advances of the engraver agonisingly. Furthermore, this experience imprinted a lifelong scar in her memories apart from the guilt.

After reuniting with her children in Cincinnati, she hugs them, "She kissed the backs of their necks, the tops of their heads and the centres of their palms, and it was the boys who decided enough was enough when she liked their shirts to kiss their tight round bellies" (Morrison, 1987, p.114) forgets all her suffering, stitches clothes for them, and calls it a 'selfish pleasure' (Morrison, 1987, p. 200). Furthermore, Sofia Wike magnifies this 'selfish pleasure' of Sethe as an act of mothering and caring for her children by sowing them something nice and holding on to the supreme experience of motherhood (2017, p.12). Sethe embodies love despite her psychological traumas and guilt and elevates motherhood through selfless acts. Sethe's dual nature proves her to be a great mother.

Through the painful actions of Sethe and her mother in abandoning their children, Morrison demonstrates the dual capacity of the mother archetype to encompass both deep love and terrible cruelty. Sethe's devotion to her children contrasts with her mother's chilling acts of killing and disregarding the babies, which stems from the trauma inflicted by White men. Through these differing responses, Morrison lays bare the complexities of African motherhood within the context of enslavement, shedding light on the subtleties of the mother archetype. The sense of helplessness, coupled with an intense desire to attend to the needs of their children, compelled African mothers like Sethe to assume responsibilities of their homes, providing a semblance of

home amid adverse circumstances and psychological traumas. Sethe's character in *Beloved* exemplifies women who persevere through discrimination, racism and subjugation to resist social injustice. Her decisions expose the difficult positions African mothers encountered, contextualising the loving and terrible dimensions of the mother archetype that emerged as African mothers like Sethe fought to preserve family and dignity. Her life reflects the incredible strengths and painful choices of African American women who, through their determination to nurture their children, redefined the meaning of motherhood against inconceivable adversity for generations.

Conclusion

Embracing motherhood is the highest sacrifice of a woman, and the African community is no exception; motherhood is highly honoured by the African community. Morrison's illustration of the mother archetype varies significantly for characters like Baby Suggs, Sethe's mother, and Sethe herself; each offers unique insights into the intricacies of maternal experiences encountered amidst enslavement. Despite enduring the loss of her children, Baby Suggs embraces maternal love by opening her home to the community. Sethe's mother, on the other hand, represents the maternal struggle under oppression, wherein she gives up babies born out of relationships with white men. Sethe navigates the dual nature of motherhood, portraying both love and terror. Morrison's depiction of Sethe in *Beloved* justifies the archetypal image of Sethe as a loving and terrible mother. The demonstration of the terrible nature of Sethe, a slave mother, occurs from her internalisation of the dehumanising treatment endured in bondage.

Nevertheless, her benevolence as a loving mother shines in her endurance of suffering to unite with her children in Cincinnati, her continuous reminiscence of her runaway boys and her acceptance of the ghost child as an atonement for her guilt. This dual nature of Sethe, a terrible and loving mother, underscores the complications of motherhood within the context of slavery. Sethe embodies motherliness through her sacrificial and filial love for her children in the only way she knew how to redefine motherhood's essence. The ambiguity of right or wrong highly depends on the perception of the individual experience and assessment.

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