The limitations to which Mernissi falls prey, which are, in my view, the search for authenticity, mystification, and foundationalism, are also symptomatic of the difficulties that Islamic feminism generally faces. In this concluding chapter, I further clarify my point through additional comparisons between the scholarship of Mernissi and other scholars of Islamic feminism. I especially focus on Amina Wadud’s Qur’anic hermeneutics, which I contrast with Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid’s. I choose to focus on these two figures because, like Mernissi, they espouse contextual reading. Wadud’s different positions, adopted in her two books *Qur’an and Woman* and *Inside the Gender Jihad*, are especially instrumental in pointing out that Islamic feminist theory based on the postulate of the normativity of gender equality in the Qur’an has reached a theoretical dead end. The project of Islamic feminism is usually carried out through revisiting the age-old male production of religious meaning, emphasizing verses in line with gender equality, and reinterpreting the ‘less clear’ texts in what pertains to gender equality through a woman-friendly perspective.

As Anne Sophie Roald argues, it is true that feminist scholars of Islam are more limited in comparison with Christian feminist theologians, who are empowered by a tradition of historical-critical method within Christian theology that allows them to see the Bible as written by human beings, men in particular.1 In Islam, this is a theological impossibility, since, even when Muslims, Sunni and Shi’a, may not agree on the Hadith, they all agree on the Qur’an’s authenticity as the Word of God. This is why scholars of gender in Islam, Roald explains, have mostly adopted a methodology that focuses on textual analysis and that seeks to emphasize evidence to establish gender equality.

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However, rarely have these scholars engaged in rethinking the concept of the ‘Word of God’ itself, which, in my view, can help transcend the theological limitations in Islam and can allow scholars to deal with the Qur’an’s androcentric discourse without apologies, or without mystification. By revisiting the concept of the ‘Word of God’ or ‘revelation,’ scholars can consider this androcentrism as historical and contextual rather than eternal and divine. This is central to the project of Islamic feminists who compromise neither their faith nor the ideal of gender equality. Such a rethinking is not ‘un-Islamic’; it goes back to the early centuries of Islamic thought with the debate that the Asharites and the Mu’tazila initiated and that continues today in the thinking of such scholars as Mohammed Arkoun, Abu Zaid, or Abdolkarim Soroush, to name only a few. Instead, Islamic feminism is built on the postulate that gender equality is normative in the Qur’an, which often leads scholars to mystification and foundationalism.

Qudsia Mirza also identifies the concept of ‘gender equality’ as one of the theoretical limitations of scholars who rethink gender in Islam. For Mirza, “the idea of equality is one that is assumed, with little or no theoretical discussion of the implications of basing it on the concept of sexual difference or sameness.” She argues that there is no real discussion of the Qur’anic concept of ‘sexual difference,’ which sometimes gives more rights to mothers, for instance, when compared with men. I am not using this criticism to argue that Qur’anic sexual difference is enabling, since it can exclude other female subjectivities that do not fall within traditional paradigms of women in the scriptures, as Mirza observes, but to show that emphasizing the specific equality (spiritual equality) advocated by the Qur’an and claiming that it is evidence for the normativity of gender equality in Qur’anic discourse is mystifying. It obscures the Qur’an’s androcentric aspect that needs to be acknowledged and dealt with without apologies.

Similarly, Kecia Ali argues that “the necessity of equality as a component of justice must be defended, not merely asserted.” According to Ali, feminist Qur’anic scholars have never raised serious questions about the universality or “the timelessness of specific points in the Qur’an and hadith.” She rightly argues that they do not discuss the concepts of ‘justice’ and ‘gender equality’ and do not address the

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2 Mirza, “Islamic Feminism,” 118.