In the early morning of Sunday August 13, 1961 residents of Berlin woke up, bewildered and surprised, to see the western sectors of their city, which had been occupied for sixteen years by the United States, Britain, and France, being cut off by barbed wire from the Soviet-occupied eastern sector, all under the supervision of the East German government. Pavements and street car tracks were torn up and in a week parts of the initial wall were built using cinder blocks, replacing the barbed wires. The original makeshift walls were then replaced by more permanent concrete walls and fortifications that extended for twenty eight miles along the East and West Berlin boundaries. This was followed by another seventy five miles of border fortification and barricades that also sealed off West Berlin from East German territory. For the next twenty eight years friends and family members were separated from each other and Berlin’s streets, subways, sewers and phone lines were cut or blocked, disrupting the services for what in many ways used to be a functioning if not unified metropolis. The border closure and construction of the physical barrier was denounced by the West German government as the “wall of shame” (Klausmeier and Schmidt, 2004: 12). But for the East German communist authorities the Berlin Wall was a defensive barrier, both physical and ideological, which they considered as an “anti-fascist protection wall” (antifaschistischer schutzwall) being erected to protect East German citizens from enemies of socialism (Taylor, 2006: 262; Wyden, 1989: 608).

At the time of the Berlin Wall’s erection in 1961 Germany was already a divided country. Following Adolf Hitler’s defeat in 1945, the invasion of Germany by the four allied nations (United States, Soviet Union, Britain and France); carved both Germany and Berlin into four occupied zones and sectors, respectively. However, the Berlin Wall finalized the political division of Germany as well as Western and Eastern Europe (See Figure 4.1).

Construction of the Berlin Wall did not happen overnight. Rather, it was the culmination of a series of historical, political, and economic events that were related to colonial rivalries among European nations in the late 19th and early 20th centuries; as well as to the increasing involvement of
Map source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Germany_occupation_zones_with_border.jpg

Figure 4.1 Divided Germany, 1945.